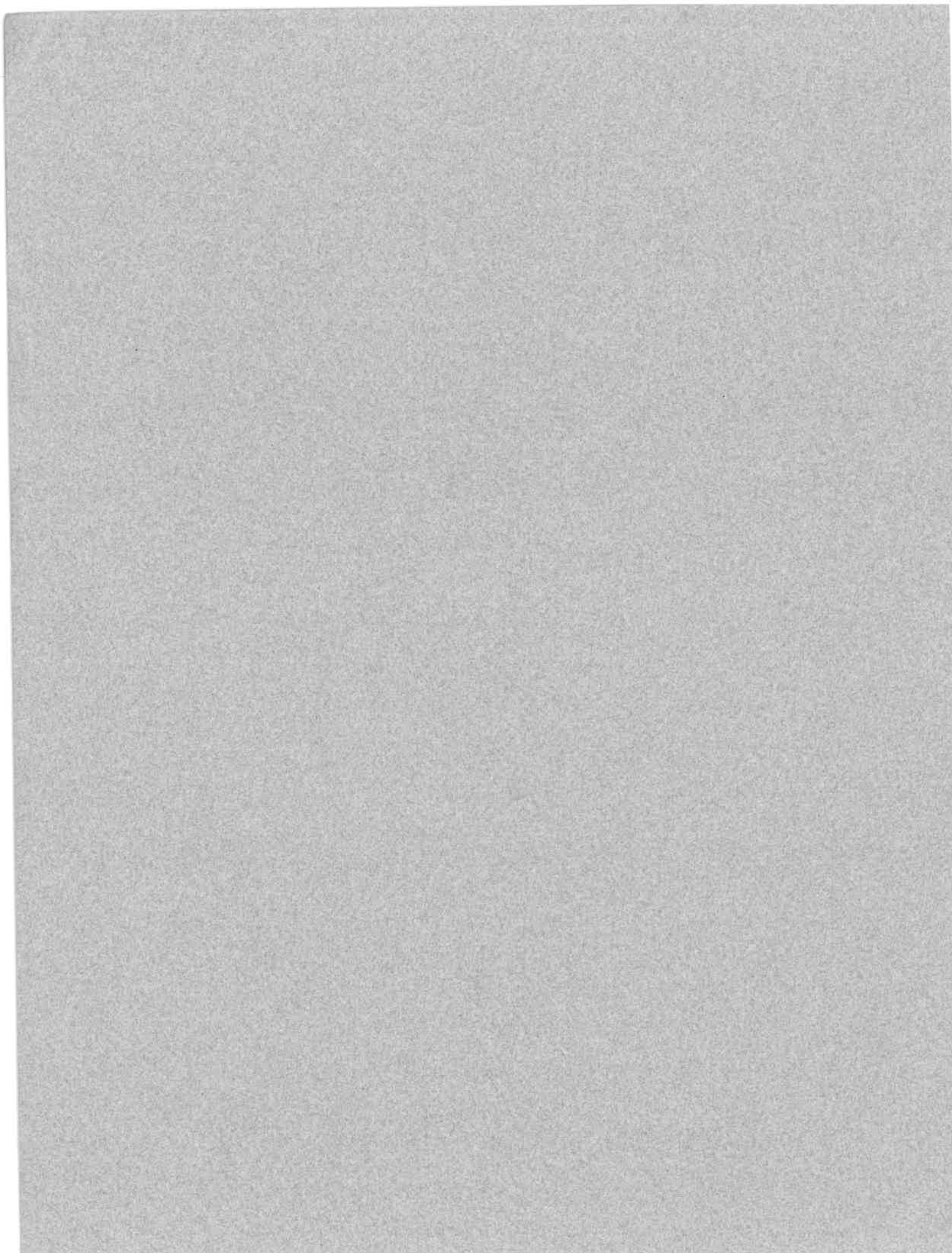


**PRO
WRESTLING
TORCH
ANNUAL
FIVE
SUMMER 1992**



PRO WRESTLING TORCH

ANNUAL V

Summer 1992

Editor/Publisher: Wade Keller

PRO WRESTLING MANAGERS

"Torch Talk" with Jim Cornette	3
"Torch Talk" with Paul E. Dangerously	26
Becoming a Pro Wrestling Manager by Chris Zavisla	50
Adventures of Grand Wizard by Brian Hildebrand	59

READER FEATURES

Torch Top Ten Lists.	60
All-Time Favorites	63
Most Memorable Moments	68

SPECIAL FEATURES

Heels with Integrity by Tim Whitehead.	73
Blanchard's New Life by Mark Nulty.	75
Pro Wrestling Regulation by Paul Dizadji	77
The King of the Ring by Jeff Cohen	80
EMLL: Survivor in Mexico by Steve Sims.	87
Special Interview: Ann Calvello by Curtis Minato	90

STAFF FEATURES

Dear Uncle Brucie by Bruce Mitchell	95
The Second Coming of the Dream by Eric Krol	98
The Importance of Shooting by Mark Madden	107

FEATURE INTERVIEW

"Torch Talk" with Honkeytonk Man	111
--	-----

Pro Wrestling Torch Annual V: Summer 1992 is published by *Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly* newsletter and editor/publisher Wade Keller. The price for the Annual is \$12.00 per copy in U.S. and Canada and \$16.00 overseas. All material herein is copyright (c) 1992 Wade Keller. All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be republished or reprinted in any way without express written consent of the editor. Any inquiries regarding subscriptions to *Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly* or questions or comments on this book can be sent to P.O. Box 201844, Minneapolis, MN 55420 or by voice/fax phone to (612) 854-4274. Subscriptions to *Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly* are available for \$6.00 per four issues (\$9.00 per four issues overseas) up to \$90.00 for 60 issues.

FORWARD

By Wade Keller, Editor/Publisher

PRO WRESTLING TORCH ANNUAL FIVE SUMMER 1992

The idea of this book was to feature what has become a tradition after only two years in these Annuals, that being a "Torch Talk Collection." This time the collection of interviews would be with pro wrestling managers. Two years ago in the third Torch Annual, there was a collection of nine interviews with announcers in wrestling. Last year in the fourth Torch Annual there were five interviews with veterans of the matgame who talked about the "Evolution of Wrestling," including the most talked about "Torch Talk" ever with Bill Watts.

This year, the collection stopped at two interviews.

Knowing that Paul E. Dangerously and Jim Cornette are not shy about speaking their mind—at length—I should have realized there would be only space for those two interviews. But not until their interviews were transcribed and laid out did I realize exactly how lengthy their interviews were. But even before I transcribed them, I knew they were two classics.

I learned a lot from conducting the interviews with the two top wrestling managers in the sport today. I learned about the sport of pro wrestling. I learned about the business of pro wrestling. I learned a lot about Jim and Paul. I even learned about myself.

In these two very special interviews, both men open up their diaries for you and me. They talk about the emotions they feel when they stand ringside as usually considerate, soft-spoken people shout vulgarities at them. They talk about the way they deal with being part of a big-man's and tough-man's business when they are neither big nor physically tough. They share incredible stories from their days on the road, in detail. They reveal their plans for the future, one year from now, two years from now, all the way to retirement.

I am proud of these interviews and am eager to get feedback and then pass that feedback on to Jim and Paul.

Following the two "Torch Talks" are two other features which round out the special section on managers. One story is by a high school teacher who happens to moonlight as a pro wrestling manager in Michigan and Ohio. He is known to Torch readers as Japanese wrestling expert Chris Zavisa. Chris walks the reader through his first few hours, his first few days, and his first few weeks in the wrestling business. He takes you inside the locker room as wrestlers prepare for an event. He takes you inside his mind as he took his first bump in the ring. Then the special section on managers concludes with an article by an independent wrestler, manager, referee, press agent, and all-around useful guy, Brian Hildebrand, who gives a first person perspective to his years on the independent scene with a few references to a young Cactus Jack.

But that's not the half of it. In fact, it's just two pages short of half of it. The other 62 pages of the Annual collectively are an anthology of diverse articles and features from many unique perspectives. One story, written by a mainstream print journalist, looks at Tully Blanchard's new life. Another story, written by a practicing lawyer, looks at athletic commission regulation of pro wrestling. The editor of Lucha Libre Weekly explains why EMLL in Mexico in many ways is the most resilient promotion in the world and what U.S. and even Japanese promotions could learn from them. Roller Derby fans will love the interview with Ann Calvello (not to mention the photo from the mid-60s accompanying the article). Those of you who say, "Roller what?" will be taken into the arenas of a now dormant sister sport to pro wrestling. Calvello reveals the downfall of roller derby, which has an eerie resemblance to many occurrences in the pro wrestling business today. And for all of you fiction fans, there is a short story which strikes at an important part of the business often overlooked by fans, promoters, and journalists: Jobbers.

The usual cast of *Torch* columnists also have made their contribution to this book. Mark Madden looks at the art and spectacle of "shooting" in pro wrestling. He examines its importance and gets comments from some of pro wrestling's greats. Bruce Mitchell stops by with a satire on "Dear Abby." Eric Krol submits a detailed analysis of Dusty Rhodes's current reign as WCW booker, including charts, analysis, and a report card on how Rhodes has performed his duty in Eric's eyes. The book concludes with an in-depth look at the World Wrestling Federation through the eyes of a man who has been there, "Honkeytonk Man" Wayne Ferris.

This is the largest *Torch* publication yet, and what I believe is the best in terms of content, diversity, photography, and layout. I must thank everyone, from the readers who shared their most memorable moments in wrestling to the usual *Torch* writers to the subjects of the interviews, and everyone else. Thanks for making this possible. And to those of you reading this, please write with comments, compliments or criticisms. I will pass along comments to those who contributed to this publication.

Until the next issue of *Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly* and the next Torch Annual, take care and watch out for foreign objects!

JIM CORNETTE

INTERVIEW

The Art and Adventures of Being a Manager in Pro Wrestling

By Wade Keller, Editor/Publisher

CHAPTER 1: THE ART OF MANAGING

Wade Keller: Define what being a professional wrestling manager is?

Jim Cornette: You know, there's no definition for what anybody should be in professional wrestling. All you should be is a personality that one way or another people find something about it that they can either like or not like. You really shouldn't follow any—well, there's rules of thumb, but really in essence, there's no pattern or profile that a manager or anybody in the pro wrestling business should follow. Just get out there and be interesting and be serious. I think one thing that is important is a manager has to be believable. The people have to believe that you mean what you say. But that's the key to a large part of the business in general. I really don't think there's any set profile.

Keller: Can a manager steal too much attention away from a wrestler, be it on interviews, in general, or at ringside?

Cornette: Well, number one, very seldom do you have a case where a manager and wrestler are about equal on interviews. Occasionally it comes up. That's what a manager is supposed to do: Talk. Except for Paul E. and me, I guess, there's not a lot of managers that work ringside really well—well, I guess Sherri Martel.

Keller: And Madusa?

Cornette: Yeah, and Madusa, I guess. She's new and I haven't been thinking a lot about WCW lately. A manager, if he's smart, works ringside really hard, but only

when the guys are not. In other words, in some point in any match comes a time when it's got to slow down, and that's when a manager has to take over. But if the guys are doing jumps off the top rope and leapfrogs and suplexes and everything, while the manager is trying to do his stuff on the outside, then that's horrible. That's why it's important for a manager to work with his guys for a long period of time on a regular basis because then you start to know when you should do your stuff and when you shouldn't.

Keller: When a manager fills in the gaps, is it just being a comedian and doing slap-stick, or is there more to it in that a manager really looks at the different points in the match and decides what to do depending on that point?

Cornette: It really depends on the point in the match. I've seen guys do this a million times and I've even done it accidentally and everybody goes through it at some point, but if you do the wrong thing at the wrong time, you can kill the whole mood of the match.

Keller: You've done that?

Cornette: I think a couple of times, yeah, such as being in the wrong place or whatever. It's gonna happen. Guys who don't have a lot of experience, that's the first thing they'll do. They'll try to do a comedy thing while guys are being serious or they'll try to do serious stuff while their guys are doing comedy. You can kill the whole mood of the match. If stuff's taking place where the babyfaces are really rocking and rolling, then the manager can jump up and really be the icing on the cake. But at the same point, if the guys are really

kicking the babyfaces across the ring and he's stumbling around or whatever, then they're not getting heat and it defeats the purpose. So you've got to know what to do when and figure out your spots. As far as taking too much attention away, me and the Midnight Express, we were together too long. The Midnight Express was a three-man team. As long as they were mad at somebody, it didn't matter. If a manager is with a guy for only a few months, then, yeah, a manager can take too much heat away from a guy. But it depends on whether the manager or wrestler is going to be sticking around. If the manager is the one who's stickin' around, then the heat



JIM CORNETTE (Photo by Wade Keller)

should be on the manager. If the wrestler's going to be sticking around, then you want the heat on the wrestler.

Keller: Was that possibly the case with Jimmy Hart in Memphis, because you were there first-hand? Did he sometimes take attention away from wrestlers on purpose because he was staying and the wrestlers came and went so fast?

Cornette: He was just so hyper-active and he's still that way as far as I know. He was a madman. He sleeps four hours a night, he's just a bundle of nerves. He was going to do his stuff whether anybody else did their stuff or not. That was just from being a manic person (laughs). But Jimmy Hart was the focal point anyway and the guys he was managing were revolving. Whereas with my situation with Bobby & Dennis and Bobby & Stan, we were always everywhere together, so as long as the attention was focused on any one or all of us, it did the team good.

Keller: Does the manager serve a purpose if the fans don't consciously notice him at ringside, such as adding a feeling of professionalism to the heel, such as J.J. Dillon or Gary Hart did?

Cornette: Gary Hart, I know he was a great manager and drew a lot of money years ago and had a lot of heat in Dallas from his reputation years ago, but I haven't seen that guy drop a bead of sweat or do anything other than kill the babyfaces deader than four o'clock since he left Dallas in 1985. When he came to the NWA, he was there ten months. I saw him sweat one day and I said, "Oh my god, it must be hot in the ring." He don't do shit. And that's just my opinion, he don't do shit. He's the type of guy who would knock my stuff behind my back when we were there. He's a snake in the grass. He killed the babyfaces, he sells nothing, he won't back up from anybody. I remember one time he was in there with Sting and Sting was advancing on him, and there's Gary Hart, pudgy, fat, bald, and 50 years old and he's just standing there saying, "Get away from me," which makes Sting look like he was as effective as a rubber crutch. So if I wanted to or if any manager wanted to, they could kill every babyface as dead as four o'clock so they'd never draw a dime just by not doing the proper thing.

Keller: What about J.J. Dillon?

Cornette: He was great. J.J. was exceptional in Florida. When he was with the Horsemen he fulfilled a great role since they were a different type of group. They were all outstanding personalities in their own right. He wasn't a manager meant to call attention to them. It was more of a business type arrangement. He is an excellent interview. He was a great worker

at one point, so when he did take bumps, they were right on. J.J. didn't attract as much attention as I did when we were both there because it was two different styles and mine was more flashy, so a lot of people said, "J.J. didn't do anything." Well, J.J. did do stuff. He did his job and he did it in his manner and his way. I think he was excellent for the slot he was in. He was much more funny in Florida. He was a lot more humorous years ago. But he didn't need to be humorous when he had the four greatest single wrestlers at any given time in the world. If he had taken over, none of those guys would have gotten over.

Keller: Why do promotions seem to hire and keep around managers who don't seem to serve much of purpose? Is it just loyalty? Off the top of my head, I think of Mr. Fuji and Paul Jones.

Cornette: Fuji, I've never met the guy. I know he was a big money-drawing wrestler years ago. I know Vince Jr., for all else that he has done, has kept a lot of promises his father made. But I don't know what his situation is. With Jones, he got over in the Carolinas mainly because he was buddies with George Scott. He was always used in some kind of situation and then he just kind of was an office politician and an infiltrator. He stuck around basically, but it was oftentimes embarrassing to watch Paul struggle to get through a promo. It got to the point where finally people did not care whether he was around or not. That became clear to even people in the audience. I guess then the final straw was when George Scott was fired. Paul had already been taken out of managing and put into road agenting. That was the opportunity to phase Paul out, because by then the boys were ready to kill him. If they had a gun, many times I would have seen him dead on the floor.

I don't know why some people are kept around and other are not. Me being now in a position to decide who's on the card and who ain't, it's very hard for me not to put people on the card because I see effort guys are putting out and they're good at what they do and I see that they're great guys that want to see the thing go. But I also see that, boy, if we put all of them on the card, we're going to spend twice as much as we make and all go out of business. So I have to draw a line with guys that even deserve to be there, want to be

there, and I want them to be there. For somebody that ain't pulling their weight, I don't know why you'd want to keep them around. Even if it was a good friend of mine, I'd say, "Look, we've got to find something else for you to do." If I wanted Mr. X to still have a job, I'd send him out doing leg work, politicking some towns, or something like that. I wouldn't put him on television just because he's a friend of mine if there's someone who can do a better job than he does.

Keller: What about wrestlers that become managers, such as the two we just mentioned, Harley Race, and others? Is that a good, natural progression? Is their past reputation enough to carry them, or should they definitely have all the managing skills also?

Cornette: You can be the greatest wrestler in the world and still not be an effective manager.

Keller: Is it worth keeping somebody around on reputation?

Cornette: Possibly, but not over the long term, I don't think. But possibly to get something out of them. Someone who's been around the business as long as Harley Race certainly has something to contribute. I don't know if I'd want him as a manager or just in the dressing room trying to teach some of these young dumbshits how to do something.

Keller: What's a common misperception about managers by non-managers in professional wrestling?

Cornette: Well, there's always, "Jesus Christ, you boys don't get in the ring. It's so easy, I wish I had your job. All you do is talk." If it was so easy all I had to do is talk, then I'd still have two good knees. The manager is always the first to get jumped. He's always the first to get punched. Number one, he's on the floor. Number two, everybody, if he does his job right, thinks they can whip him. And number three, he's the focal point for the heat. So he's always the one who gets jumped first by the people.

It's a two-way street. I wouldn't want to have to go to the gym every day and work out and take bumps every night for anything in the world. I like to get in there and work and try to do what I can do. I've done that on a lot of independent shows with the Fantastics over the past year. It's



CORNETTE IN THE RING (Photo by Wade Keller)

fun for me. I don't mind taking bumps and shit. As a matter of fact, when I'm managing I sometimes take too many. I shouldn't let the guys get to me that much. But, it's fun for me. But I wouldn't want to do that every night and rely on it, because that's not my specialty. But on the same token, it's an awful hard job, even when I was just managing alone to keep track of the dates, keep track of the promos, keep track of the programs. That's what I think a manager ought to do if he's going to actually manage a guy. He's got to keep track of the times the interviews are shown and the airdates of the TVs and make sure your guys don't make continuity mistakes that are really embarrassing. And also do the interviews and also try to help with the finishes and improve the team. You're looking at it from the outside and you can't tell as well what's going on from inside the ring as you can from outside looking in. That's why I always tried to help the Midnight Express become all the better.

Keller: Did you work to overcome the preconceptions?

Cornette: I just do whatever I'm going to do and not worry about it. Geez, how can I say this? It's the same way people used to always say when Paul E. came in, "Oh boy, you're gonna want Paul E. out of there." No, I didn't want Paul E. out of there because it was something fresh for me to

do. If I do my shit and I always do whatever I'm supposed to do as well as I can at the time, if I do that and they want to use somebody else or somebody else does something better than me, that's fine. I don't worry about that. I've never minded having other managers around because I'm going to do my stuff and I don't think anybody does my stuff like me. So I don't worry.

Keller: How much actual managing of the wrestlers' affairs did you do that actually took burdens away from them?

Cornette: Paul Ellering took care of everything for the Road Warriors, and I mean everything, investing their money and the whole nine yards. I mean he was their manager. With the Midnight Express, especially when we were working for Crockett and going on those Great American Bash tours and all the time we were flying all over the place, I made all the car reservations, all the hotel reservations, I kept the dates we had and made sure everything was there waiting for us. When we went to TVs, the first thing I'd do is look at the formats and see what the guys were doing and structure it out and I went to the guys and worked out their matches to make it easier for them.

Keller: How often did you believe you learned something incredible about being a manager, something that made you better at your job?

Cornette: You always learn and you never stop learning until the day you get out of the business. There's something that you're always going to pick up on. That's why I sat and watched our (Smokey Mountain Wrestling) TV taping the other night, and the best match that all the way through got the most crowd reaction for what they did was Paul Orndorff and Ronnie Garvin. When you think about it, our best working babyfaces in our territory from a pure psychology standpoint are Bob Armstrong and Ronnie Garvin with a combined age of 104. And so, you know, you can never make up for experience. You're always going to pick up something every time you go out there, probably.

Keller: What are some of the things that you've learned about being a manager in the last six months to a year, especially since you've moved to the independents?

Cornette: I see the difference in people mostly. People are reacting to wrestling again like they used to. We'd go up north and wrestling is totally shot. Wrestling I don't think will ever be able to return to Philadelphia, Boston, New York as people remember it because the people are all smartened up and the people all like the heels and the people all want to let you know about it. I've got people out there that I love, but you can't have a proper wrestling match under those conditions because the reactions are all wrong. If the comedian walks up on stage and tells his jokes and the people start crying, well, how good is his performance going to be? It fucks his head all up. That's what happens when you go up North and try to have a wrestling match. You can't do it right when crowds are like that. That's what I've learned the last six months being with these crowds again. You don't really learn anything, but you do the old things you used to do because they work now. And you rely less on comedy because actually the manager, except possibly on spot shows, the manager is supposed to make people mad. But you couldn't do that the past couple years because all the people wanted to see was a show. But now getting back in front of people who want to see wrestling, I'm getting those old tricks back of how to get people frothing at the mouth and getting them to punch me in the face.

Keller: What is one of the best tricks?

Cornette: It just depends. That's where the manager has to play off the match and where you just gotta' look like you're enjoying what those guys are doing to the heroes. You've got to get to the people. I never cuss at people—well, maybe up close one-on-one, but never so everyone can hear—but you just get on them or pick up on something about them or their girlfriend. Or just their actions, even they can't hear what you are saying. You've got to look like you're enjoying being an asshole.

Keller: Do you ever get or have you gotten input from wrestlers on how to be an effective manager or do they just have no clue?

Cornette: The guys that have had good managers in the past always remember what they did. From the time that I first got started, Dutch Mantel helped me a little bit. Danny Davis and Ken Wayne, they really

helped me a lot as far as managing tag teams, distracting the referee and that kind of stuff, because they were one of the best teams I've ever seen. You get stuff off of everybody you work with.

Keller: How did you develop the art of the interview? Is it just natural for you to carry a storyline into words or did you really have to work on it and create interview formulas?

Cornette: Well, when I started out, I just tried to go out there and say what I was supposed to say half-way decently without the people going, "Who is this guy?" Then I tried to get a little more umph! into it. I look at my interviews now—I think we talked about this one time—from the first year and I said, "Oh, god, I wish those were never on television." But people were telling me at the time I was doing good. I guess I was doing good for the amount of time I had been doing it. But really, the important part is—and I try to tell guys this—if you can speak, you can do an interview. The thing is, if something has been done to you, then you have to put yourself in the position of what you would say if that actually

because everyone said a babyface manager could never get over.

Jerry Lawler, he knows this—one time he told me, "You've made more money with my lines than I have," and he's the greatest interview in the history of professional wrestling, bar none. And I grew up watching him and the thing that made me look and listen at what he was saying was that no matter what position he was in, number one, he made sense, number two, you believed him, and number three, he made whatever he was talking about seem like it was important. He doesn't have a formula. He just goes out there and is credible. Well, he has his own formula that nobody can compete with. You can spot a Jerry Lawler interview even if it's written down because it's different than anybody else's. The point is, he made sense out of anything. And guys that do good interviews can do that. There's different kinds of personalities that can get away with not making a lick of sense and still make a lot of money. But I don't think I could do that.

Keller: Who have you learned the most from about doing interviews? Would it be Lawler?

Cornette: It would have to be Lawler. Just because he was an outstanding example and I grew up listening to him.

Keller: Who is second?

Cornette: Oh, geez. (pause)

Keller: Not the second greatest, because you could probably listen to Ric Flair's best interviews and it might not have much to do with you, but who influenced your style the most second to Lawler?

Cornette: If I went out there and said even one or two of Ric Flair's lines, I mean it would be ridiculous. After Lawler, I would have to say "everybody else." I used to do imitations of Terry Funk, imitations of Dusty Rhodes. Lawler gave me the start. I got the basis for that. Then what I did was take what the other guys did—not necessarily what they said—and adapted it to what I could do. I've done a couple of Dusty Rhodes interviews, but I've never said anything Dusty Rhodes would say. What I did was I took his way of doing things. Just the way he would phrase something. Also, the most important part is you have to have something yourself. You

can't just glom together about 14 different guys' styles. You've got to have something of your own that you wrap it around. I've listened to Bobby Heenan, and Heenan's great, but he's got kind of a flip-type of thing that I just don't think I could do. I've never sat down and tried to study Bobby Heenan and try to do him.

CHAPTER 2: LOOKING AT HIS COLLEAGUES

Keller: What is it about Bobby Heenan that made him successful and also that you admire him for because you can't come close to duplicating it?

Cornette: Number one, he was always a better worker than most of the guys he managed. Secondly, he has a more one-line sarcastic style. I don't think I could go that far that way. He's a great interview, a great talker. He makes things important. He's been there a long time now. Managers tend to become stale when they are in the same place all the time and you've got the same people to talk about all the time. Now that Bobby's just doing commentary, you know, he gets in that pattern—we all do. But I think Heenan has just been very good for a very long time.

Keller: What is it that made him so successful?

Cornette: He came along at a time when it was a very successful territory. He managed a lot of top talent. Like I said, he was good on the mic and had a good presence. When they got him in the ring, he could perform there, too. He kept it fresh for a long time. He gets heat—or used to. Now they don't try.

Keller: What is the one quality that you would take from Bobby Heenan and add to your repertoire?

Cornette: I don't know. I've always wanted to be able to do that backwards flip-over the top turnbuckle that he used to do. In Indianapolis in '74, Bruiser would shoot him into the turnbuckle and he'd go up and over.

Keller: How about Paul E. Dangerously. What is it about him that makes him successful and something that you admire?

Cornette: Paul E. is the most dislikable human being that I've met in ages.



JERRY LAWLER (Photo By Wade Keller)

happened. And the babyface interview is so much harder to do than the heel interview. That's why I enjoyed being a babyface for that time because there's even more psychology because you have to say what the people want to hear and what they wish they could say. So I enjoyed doing that

Keller: On camera or also behind the scenes?

Cornette: All around. I mean, Paul E., and he'll be the first to tell you, he rubs a lot of people the wrong way. I told him one time, "Paul E., you're the only human walking the Earth that can turn me babyface. He's just got that quality that grates on people, and that's what they tell me that I have. That's why I was able to get into the business in the first place. Paul E. has that quality that rubs people the wrong way and he works at it. And he's from New York. People basically dislike people from New York, anyway. He's got a lot of pluses going for him. He's a jerk.

Keller: What do you admire about him?

Cornette: He works incredibly hard at what he does. He worries about it, as a matter of fact, too much. He worries about being good and doing this and doing that. He frets over his stuff if he thinks it's not going to come through. He genuinely wants to become a great manager. And I'll admire effort over talent. A guy who's got all the talent in the world and don't want to use it, I don't care. But if somebody—and I'm not saying this applies to Paul—is even mediocre, but works hard, I like effort. I honor effort.

Keller: What is the one quality you would like to take from Paul?

Cornette: I would have to say the ability to make as little hair as he's got stand up on his head and make it look so full.

Keller: All right, what's the second quality you'd acquire?

Cornette: (laughs) Gosh, I don't know whether anybody ought to want to take qualities from somebody or not. Paul E. has a real expressive face, especially with those eyes. He can get a lot of things over just with one of those goofy expressions. That may be something I would like to try to do a little better.

Keller: Did Paul E. overdo it on make-up when he debuted on TBS?

Cornette: Oh, Jesus Christ, he wears make-up. I think he sleeps in it. Yeah, he was orange. That was when WCW was starting up and TBS took over. They'd have make-up people and hair stylists and all that bullshit. Herd came up to me when I

started doing commentary. I'm always pale, I hate sunlight. That's my gimmick, I'm pale. But, Jesus Christ, they had me wearing make-up. I fought to the bitter end. Paul E. is a little more into "television" than I am, so he don't mind doing that stuff. To me, my theory, and my theory for Smoky Mountain Wrestling, the television is shooting the wrestling. With TBS, they worked the wrestling around the TV. With us, we work TV around the wrestling. I don't care if guys wear make-up or come out looking like death warmed over, it's what they do that counts.



JIMMY HART (Photo by Wade Keller)

Keller: What about Lou Albano? Did you see much of his work?

Cornette: No, no I didn't. I never saw the WWF except for an occasional Madison Square Garden cable show over at Norm Dooley's house. And even when I started trading tapes, there was never anything up there I wanted to see, to be real honest with you.

Keller: What was it about Jimmy Hart that made him successful?

Cornette: He was great. He was a nut. With Jimmy, there was never any telling what he was going to say or what he was going to do. This was back when if a manager was funny, the fans got mad because he was making fun of the guys they liked. And that's a quality that we've lost a lot, too. So Jimmy, he could rip the guys. They hated him. He was weaselly

type of character and a skinny little jerk and a whiny-voiced coward. I mean, just all the proper qualities. And plus, he had 90 minutes every Saturday morning to go out there and just do whatever he wanted to do. So, I don't know whether it would have gotten over in all parts of the country because it was so different from what most people were used to, but since Memphis was a little bit wilder than most places anyway, it was perfect. I used to sit and roar at him myself when I'd watch the TV show every Saturday.

That really bugged me when I first started managing because people used to always tell me, "Awe, you just want to be like Jimmy Hart." The only thing that I was basically doing the same as Jimmy was being a manager and being a skinny—at the time—little jerk. I really wasn't trying to do anything like Jimmy. But Jimmy was so established that anybody who wanted to be a manager who wasn't 350 pounds and black with an afro, they would be compared to Jimmy Hart.

Keller: If you could acquire one quality that Jimmy Hart had, what would that be?

Cornette: Metabolism. The guy has not slept more than four hours a night since like 1978 and he eats like a pig and never gains weight. And all that energy. If you would have hooked up a pulse-meter at ringside to him, he would have blown the scale off. I think energy is what got Jimmy over better than anything else.

Keller: Are there any other managers out there who you have really looked at and admired?

Cornette: There is a guy named Darell Van Horne. He sent me a tape and I watched it. He dresses and looks a little too much like Paul E. Dangerously. I can see people are going to make that comparison if he gets some exposure. But, if he changed maybe the way he looked a little bit, just a different approach, the guy can talk and he's new. He genuinely wants to do it. A lot of managers are people hanging around ringside because he sold 20 tickets to the show, so the promoter puts him on the card. But this guy, I think, could do something at some point.

Keller: Are there any managers out of the past who have had an influence on you?

Cornette: Growing up, of course, I

watched Sam Bass and Sir Clemens, Dr. Ken Ramey, Sal Weingroff. Even though I'm not like any of those guys, I still enjoyed them. It's just none of the things they particularly did seemed to fit me. Managing is like wrestling, there's not as many managers as there used to be that are good just like there aren't as many wrestlers as there used to be that are good talents.

Keller: *Are there any other managers who have a ton of potential?*

Cornette: Ron Wright, if given the time and the space, could get over anywhere, just because he's different. And a lot of people who read the *Torch* and get the *Observer*, they may look and say, "He doesn't wear flashy outfits and he doesn't do four-star interviews and he doesn't swear murder on people and he doesn't have these clever lines," but this is something I want to get into, the state of the business in general. You've got to remember that the people who read the sheets—and I like a lot of them and there's nothing wrong with the people that read the sheets and they're not bad people—but that's a group of five or six thousand people who see wrestling differently. They are smart to the business to differing degrees. They see wrestling for their own brand of entertainment whereas you forget the object of this thing is for people to see it as believable. For people to see the people involved as real. For those people, to see Ron Wright, an old, broke-down wrestler in a wheelchair whining about arthritis and his arteries hardening and the hip implants he needs and his heart monitor is hooked up and he's taking his pills, and he's got a susceptibility to strokes and he's whining about wanting money, he just appears like a poor old man. But then he goes out there and he's handing out brass knuckles and handing out chains and he's tripping guys up. That gets over with wrestling fans. And wrestling fans and newsletter readers are two different things. They're still wrestling fans, but they're seeing a different kind of entertainment than the average wrestling fan is seeing.

Since I'm on the subject, Smoky Mountain Wrestling, to me, a lot of times—I know Mike Gunter and John Hitchcock and them were over at "Fire on the Mountain" and they were saying, "Yeah, it was a great show, but Orndorff and Garvin

was a little show." Because, see now, so many of the sheet readers have seen the Japanese tapes. Japanese wrestling, unless you took five years to reeducate the country, would not get over in this country as a main event draw. It could get over as a feature match. It's a lot of action and it's beautiful. I watch it, too. But the average wrestling fan wants to see a fight between people that they care about. That's one thing Japanese cannot do, because of the language barrier or whatever, is projecting personality. They can't get into personal issues. So they say Orndorff and Garvin was a little slow. They had a match like you would have seen 15 years ago. Everything they did had a purpose. Everything they did was believable. Everything they did was in connection with what would happen if two guys were having a wrestling match. They built it. There was crowd psychology. And they got them up, and when Garvin finally got the Garvin stomp on Orndorff—the Garvin stomp is not exactly a Jushin Liger flip—the place came apart. It's psychology.

I want to differentiate what Smoky Mountain Wrestling is trying to do versus what a lot of the newsletter readers want to see. We're trying to bring back wrestling as a credible form of sport and entertainment, not sports-entertainment. Psychology is 60 percent of the business if not more. Nobody has any psychology anymore. To draw money, you don't have to provide five-star matches with Jushin Liger flips off the top rope out onto the floor and out through the barricades every week because what do you come back with? It gets to the point where the trapeze artist can't do the quadruple somersault anymore because the people are bored by it, so he's got to do five. There's a limit to human ability. But, if you get somebody involved in a match through psychology, wanting to see somebody beaten or piledriver or beaten up. The people, during Garvin vs. Orndorff, wanted to see a piledriver so bad they couldn't see straight (because the only way to win the match was to pin your opponent after a piledriver). It all built up during the course of the match. And, sure it's slower-paced, because it takes longer to do that. But the payoff at the end is there. You get a bigger crowd reaction from the average fan from having the 20 minute match and building to that climactic point than you would have had you done ten of

the most spectacular spots in the world where nobody sold nothing and it didn't mean anything.

So, the difference is, the sheet readers are smart to the business and they see it as entertainment. They're not rooting for somebody to win, they're rooting for somebody to do moves. Well, if there were 500,000 of them, then God bless them and we'd do every move in the book. But since there's 500,000 of the other people that want to get behind somebody and see somebody win and lose and want to see what's gonna happen, you gear what's gonna happen to them and hope it pleases both groups. I think if they sit down and take a look at the good matches that use some psychology, they will be pleased and they will get into it. It may not be the quickest-paced thing in the world, but the whole object of the thing is to get people involved in it and draw some money.

Keller: *For instance, look at Major League Baseball. A lot of people have their favorite team, but ESPN and the networks, when they carry Major League Baseball games on national television, they do very well. So, there has to be something to the art of baseball that people get into, whether they care who wins and loses or not. So the point you make is right, that there are two groups of fans in wrestling. Because there are always the baseball fans who couldn't care less about the baseball game being boring as long as their team wins.*

Cornette: A lot of the viewers watch those games between out of town teams because it's going to affect their team later. Plus, regardless of whether it affects their team or not, they watch it because it's a shoot. Wrestling is different anyway. Wrestling has always survived on personal issues.

Keller: *You're right, and analogies between pro wrestling and anything never are perfect parallels.*

Cornette: Jushin Liger could have been on the Fire on the Mountain card last Saturday night and Robert Fuller could have been on the card, and I guarantee you Fuller would have sold more tickets. Fuller has been in the area, he's been established for 20 years, and he can talk. He's a name people around here know. Then there's Jushin Liger—and I'm not picking on the guy right now, it's just that he's one of the darlings right now—he's a great athlete

who does tremendous stuff and I enjoy watching him, but if I'm going to book a card based on what I think is going to put people in the building, then I'm going to bypass Jushin Liger because nobody gives a shit in East Tennessee about Jushin Liger and I'm going to put Robert Fuller on the card. Everybody said that the Rock & Roll Express were has-beens, they don't mean anything anymore. (laughs) Brother, you should have heard that reaction when they hit the curtain. The girls were crying. I had goose bumps. I had been standing in the ring and seen that reaction standing in a \$100,000 house a lot of times, and I could see cash registers ringing. The point is, when you have talent to work and when you've got a name behind you, it's a nostalgia thing, a lot of it, sure. But the point is, they're a good team and they will be there down the stretch.

Keller: *It's not just nostalgia because there are girls cheering them who are too young to remember their previous glory days.*

Cornette: Yeah, they can get over from scratch even if nobody's ever heard of them because they know what they're doing.

CHAPTER 3: WHAT IT TAKES TO MAKE IT AS A WRESTLING MANAGER

Keller: *What originally inspired you to become a manager? Did the thought cross your mind before Jarrett gave you that call and asked you to come to TV?*

Cornette: I had thought about doing anything and everything, but I had never seriously sat down and thought about doing this and not doing that because I never thought I'd have the chance. It came as a complete and utter shock to me. I couldn't sleep for two days after the call.

Keller: *When did you first realize you would be a damn good wrestling manager?*

Cornette: I thought at first if I could just be okay they would keep me around. I don't even actually remember. I knew I was doing a good job for what I was doing and for there, but I never thought anyone anywhere else would want to see me. When I started I thought that I would be in Memphis forever because managers didn't move around a lot. But when I actually got to go to Louisiana and got to do some other

stuff, I thought, "Geez, I may actually be getting good at this."

Keller: *What qualities or personality characteristics did you have as a kid that helped make you a great manager?*

Cornette: Totally none. I was the shyest human being in the world when I was a kid. I mean, I was always into movies



JIM CORNETTE & THE MIDNIGHT EXPRESS
(Photo by Wade Keller)

and TV and reading books and trivia and stuff like that which helps you in performing anything, but I was always really shy. And I mean up until the time I started being around the business, I never really got out of that. And then I still wasn't the most uproarious person in the world until I got in the business, but at least I had come a long way in the five or six years previous to that. I always stayed a lot to myself. I was always cracking jokes about something.

Keller: *So people saw the sense of humor early, even when you were shy?*

Cornette: Yeah, that's probably what it was, you know, because the shy kids always try to be funny, right? Either that or they sit in their room and burn candles and get into black magic.

Keller: *Compared to when you first got into managing, how has your definition of the role of a manager changed from what it is today?*

Cornette: I don't know that it has, really. I had seen what other people had done. I didn't know what other people had done in that situation. And just basically, on the surface of it, you do the interview for the guy, hang out at ringside, and interfere. It's what you do with that basic premise that makes a difference.

Keller: *How long did it take before people stopped treating you like you would just be another manager who would be out of wrestling in a few months?*

Cornette: I think when I went to work in Mid-South.

Keller: *You never got that feeling in Memphis?*

Cornette: Wherever you start, you never get over where you start, really. I shouldn't say never, but it was, "Well, he's another one of those Memphis guys hanging around." But when you go somewhere else and draw money and then come back, I mean, Eddie Gilbert did the same thing. All the guys who have started in Memphis and then come back made more impact on their return. Look at Ricky Morton. It means more after you go somewhere and do something where they've never heard of you.

CHAPTER 4: LEARNING IN MEMPHIS AND MID-SOUTH

Keller: *What are the two main things about those Memphis days that you learned the most about being a manager?*

Cornette: Every time you go out to the ring, you get more comfortable doing it. So, I spent a year and a half there and it helped out quite a bit. By the time I went somewhere where I could really take off, like when I went to Louisiana, it wasn't so strange for me. I remember the first time they had me in a mixed tag match, it was me and Jesse Barr against Koko Ware and Jimmy Hart, I had never stood on the ring apron and watched a match before. It was really weird. That's a tremendous handicap to try to draw money when you're not even familiar being where you're being.

Keller: *Did any time when you were with Memphis during your first few months have any influence over the direction of the promotion?*

Cornette: Basically, I just went out and did my thing. I had known a lot of the guys before I became a manager, so I'd ask them if it would be good if I did this and they didn't say, "Aw, shut up kid!" I didn't want to stick too much in there because I didn't know why any of this stuff was being done in the first place. Hopefully I didn't come off as trying to dictate what was going on. Now, on the interviews, I started saying, "I can say this or I can say that." I started having ideas which went along with what I was doing. That I did first.

Keller: From there you went to Mid-South. What were some of things that were really different from Memphis?

Cornette: Brother, it was night and day. In Memphis, even though people were really into the matches, they were drawing good crowds, and people believed most of what was going on, they were not fighters. I think I got punched two or three times in Tennessee in a year and a half. I bettered that in Louisiana in the first two weeks. Those people would fight you. Louisiana is just a really scummy part of the Earth with a bunch of stinking scummy people in it, to be quite honest. There are some great people there, too, and some nice places, but on a whole, they're a bunch of wild people. All the guys joked about it, it was like being in another country. So that was different. There was more of an overhanging sense of danger at all of the shows, both in the ring and out of the ring. But that was the major difference. In Memphis, things were a little lighter. People came and would get into the matches, but in Memphis you didn't fear for your life. And the roads were better and it was more fun. It was easier with shorter trips. But at the same time, I made four times as much money in Louisiana.

Keller: Who did you learn the most from in that area?

Cornette: I learned a lot from Bill Dundee, since he was the booker. He used me well in Tennessee. Dundee's got the best finishes in the business. I learned a lot from him and wrote them all down. Bobby and Dennis at that point, I learned a lot from, because I rode with them all the time. I learned a lot from watching Bill Watts and Dundee, I learned from being around Bobby and Dennis.

Keller: Did Dennis stand out in your



BILL DUNDEE (Photo by Tracy Breeden)

mind above others?

Cornette: Dennis knows a lot about the business, but Dennis was never wrong. Just ask Dennis and he'll tell you. There were things that I disagreed with him on. He knew a lot about the business because he had been in it a long time and he wouldn't mind teaching you, either. But I wouldn't say he was the shiniest beacon of wrestling knowledge, but he definitely was smart.

Keller: How did Bill Watt treat you as a manager?

Cornette: He only yelled at me, I think, once or twice the whole year I was there. Jesus Christ, he screamed at his son every five minutes, so I did pretty good. He treated me great. He always had me doing a lot of stuff. I didn't like getting my head shaved that one time, but apart from that everything was fine. He always gave me a lot of compliments, not to me, but to other people about me.

Keller: Working for Bill Watts, what do you think were his strongest and weakest points? Was yelling too much a negative thing?

Cornette: Well, yelling wasn't a negative thing. If Bill Watts yelled at you, you made pretty darn sure that you tried not to let it happen again. That is what you need if you're running a company that big with a bunch of ya-hoos he had working for him—and like he has now. I yell a lot. Of course, it don't have the same weight or feeling behind it as when Bill Watts yells. I

don't think that's a negative. He ran the place the way he wanted to run it, and it's his business. That's the thing that I agree with him on that he said in the "Torch Talk." The bottom line is, I think if somebody runs their own business, they can do anything they goddamn want to with that business, and that includes hiring pink and purple polka-dotted people. Obviously the idea is to make a lot of money, but if you want to present wrestling or roller derby just for yourself, and you can do it, it's your business, go ahead and do it.

Keller: If running the company the way he wanted to was one strength, what was another?

Cornette: His organization. He knew what was going on in that business and he had it very well organized. He is a very smart guy. And also, he had the best commentator in the wrestling business, and that was himself, to get all of his points across.

Keller: What about two weaknesses?

Cornette: Weaknesses? The houses that were drawn, we could have made more money on. He was not the most generous payoff person in the world. But, still, you made more money than elsewhere. I was told that before I went to the territory: "You'll make half what you should make and twice what you can make anywhere else." I was the least person who could complain since I was making \$14 a week in Memphis since when Lawler was booking, he didn't have anything to do with me because Hart was his guy. I couldn't complain about the money at all, but other guys who had been to other places and done other things could.

It's hard to think back and remember weaknesses. I'm sure being there every day, there were some. He was hard on guys as far as fines. I can understand fining for being late or fining for missing a show, but when you come in at 6:40, ten minutes late, after driving on some of those roads, that's a pretty hard rule. But then what do you make the cutoff? 6:43? 6:47? You've got to have rules. He didn't do anything that was insane and goofy, not like it was in Dallas.

CHAPTER 5: THE VON ERICH ERA

Keller: What did you learn from going to Dallas?

Cornette: I learned the no matter how good your business is, it will fall down unless you try to keep track of it. I got the feeling that Dallas was a backyard promotion that had suddenly exploded and gotten so hot that they didn't know what to do with it. All they had to do was not screw it up and it would continue, but they screwed it up.

Keller: Why did you go to Dallas in the first place?

Cornette: When we were about ready to finish up in Mid-South, Dusty gave us a call. That was December 14, 1984. We were going to do the scaffold matches with the Rock & Roll Express and Dusty had called us and Jimmy Crockett had called us and they were trying to put everything together. Dusty had just gotten the booking job. Dusty had worked in the SuperDome and he wanted the Midnight Express and Jim Cornette. Heck, we knew we were finishing up and nobody had said anything to us, so the boys appointed me to call Jim Crockett and Dusty Rhodes. So I did and they said they wanted to bring us in for TVs in December and January and see what goes from there. That seemed excellent.

Well, then Dundee called Bobby up and said Watts wants us to go to Dallas and work for Fritz (Von Erich). None of us had ever been there before. We had only seen it on TV. But the point was, Watts at the time was working up a deal where he would work with Fritz so he could get us back any time he wanted us for shots or to come back or whatever. Also, because they were working together. So I said, "Geez, I told Crockett we'd go over there." Then Dundee started working on Bobby and Dennis: "It's gonna be burning a bridge." So Watts had done a lot of stuff for us, so we got talked into calling Jimmy and Dusty and telling them that they committed us to go over to Dallas. We owed it to Watts and bah, bah, bah. Nobody was too mad there.

What we had done before we made the final decision was to go make our first shot with Dallas. We gave them our notice our first night in, explaining that we had committed to going to the Carolinas. So Ken Mantell began giving us a pitch to stay, telling us how much the guys made, like the Freebirds making over \$100,000 and at only four days a week. But anyway, we get over there and this was a place that was really old time. The buildings were old time, the

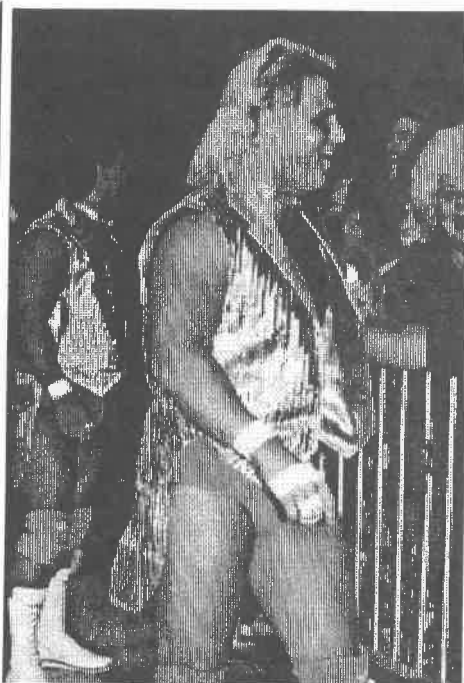
people were old time, they were older old time than what I even like. A hot finish for them was that the Von Erichs couldn't remember anything complicated. So the one good thing was the Fantastics were already there and I have known Bobby Fulton forever. We had those great matches with them where we had those wild finishes that people just went nuts over since they had never seen hot finishes before. So finally we decided to stay for a while. Of course, as soon as we get over there, they have a fight—Fritz and Watts—and end their working agreement. So while they're running the SuperDome, we're in McAllen, Tex. in front of 14 people in a bull ring or something.

Keller: Overall, the pay was nowhere near what you earned in Mid-South?

Cornette: The thing is, it was so strange there, because they kept a small crew, but they'd run two spot shows per night and have eight guys on each show. And they weren't used to having tag teams in the territory. So what they'd do is quite often put the Fantastics and the Midnight Express on a card with two of the guys who would have to wrestle a singles match called a "Captains Match," so each night the guys would have to work twice. Then they'd always put us on last because the boys couldn't follow it, but they'd get main event pay and we'd fight the traffic. Then at other times, they'd run spot shows with Dennis in one town and Bobby in the other against either Tommy Rogers or Bobby Fulton. They didn't keep the tag team thing up and they really did not let us do really broad angles that developed from week to week, they just kind of kept the rivalry going. We worked with the Fantastics for the entire six months we were there and really never did a big blow-off or never came to a conclusion.

Keller: Did you ever work against the Von Erichs?

Cornette: About five times over six months. It was strange. We never ever got to do the briefest angle. The closest I came to being involved in an angle was when Rip Oliver was brought in and I managed him and he slammed Mike Von Erich's hand in the door. It was just fine because we could have great matches with the Fantastics whereas with the Von Erichs, you never knew what was going to happen.



THE FANTASTICS (Photo by Wade Keller)

Keller: How was it that they became this nationally syndicated promotion when they had no sophistication?

Cornette: A series of fuck-ups. They happened to be in Dallas, Texas which had a great production company that started shooting their TV show. Somebody had the bright idea to syndicate it back before wrestling was syndicated nationally. It caught on because the production values were better than most wrestling shows. Well, then about the same time I guess they had these three babyfaces who were over like crazy, but nobody could give them a fight. Well, then came three Freebirds and it just popped. They really didn't do anything anyone cared about one way or the other except the Freebirds and the Von Erichs. That got over so much and everybody was in the right place at the right time and it got huge.

Keller: So they didn't necessarily do anything wrong by going out of business, it was just that their luck ran out?

Cornette: No, they did everything wrong. They didn't have to do anything right to keep it the way it was. We would go to these spot shows 15 miles from my apartment in Dallas and draw ten, twelve, fifteen grand. They never really did anything particularly right other than normal angles. Ken Mantel wasn't the booker, he was the babysitter. He used to let

the guys do their own thing and come up with their own ideas. There would be 12 guys at the booking meetings just throwing ideas out. They had a tremendous population to draw from, nobody's TV was encroaching on theirs for the most part. Texas was a great wrestling area. All they had to do was not screw-up, but then they kept getting arrested and running into things or kept exposing themselves as the screw-ups that they are—or were as the case may be. Gradually, the people realized that instead of being these heroes that they thought that they were, these Texas idol—and you know Texans about Texas are just nuts—they gradually began to realize these guys were a bunch of dipshits that they placed their trust in. So they turned away in droves. When I first got there, boy, if you were on World Class Wrestling, you could be on any radio show you wanted to just by calling up. People stopped you in the mall. Wrestling was the hottest thing in town. They were printing full-color, full-page posters of the wrestlers in the Dallas Times-Herald every week. By the time I went down there a couple of years later for a Watts card, you were on the same level as the guy who ran the ferris wheel at the Dallas County Fair. It was an amazing transformation

Keller: Talk about the Von Erich family.

Cornette: Not one of them has ever been nasty to me. And I hate to knock them, but they were not the brightest guys in the world to begin with. See, I'm not all that educated on what you take to get what reaction or response, or what you look like when you're on what. I always thought they were just really dull. I never hung around them at the hotel, I never hung around them outside since I never go to bars. Then I would hear stories from other guys saying what they were on.

Chris Von Erich, when he was 13 years old, he got on a Southwest airplane one time and he looked like he didn't know if he was on a moon rocket or not. You know, guys would say that when he would come in with vials of cocaine and piles of pills in his pocket and this and that thing, I mean, it was just nuts. And Fritz, until I started going to the booking meetings the last month I was there, I had only seen Fritz in person twice. The first time I saw him I had been there almost three months and he came up and welcomed me. He said,

(imitating Fritz) "Nice to have you here, son. It's just amazing. How do you remember all those different points you talk about on television. It is just incredible." Then off he went. I guess he was oblivious to what was going on.



KERRY VON ERICH (Photo by Wade Keller)

Keller: So he might not have known anything about his sons' habits outside of the ring?

Cornette: Well, I heard from some of the other guys that it was like he would hear it, but not believe it. And David Manning and Ken Mantell and all the guys in the office, what they were was babysitters for the Von Erichs to keep them from getting caught or too fucked up or making sure they make the towns. Well, half the time they'd miss the spot shows if they wanted to go to a concert. Sometimes they'd drive 100 miles to the town and if it wasn't at the high school, instead of checking for another school or a different building, they'd just go home.

Keller: Did you ever get a feeling for what their mother thought of all of this?

Cornette: I met her only a couple of times. It was just a strange situation. Here they were, just a really screwed-up family, but nobody would mention it, even to each

other. In all the interviews, they'd talk about God and family. Give me a break. I guess keeping up the image was most important. The boys were nice to me, it's just it was very strange being around that company.

Keller: What else was strange about it?

Cornette: It was a different type of wrestling promotion. We had the same spot show line-up months at a time, but people would come. It was the only show in town. They got over so good at one point that the people didn't realize it was all accidental. Finally, they figured out that the Von Erichs were not all they perceived them to be, and that was it. They never got any other talent over. The heels had heat, but they never put any heat on them.

Keller: What did you think of Chris Adams and Gino Hernandez?

Cornette: Gino, to be honest with you, I thought was only a mediocre worker. He was a good talker. He was a shoot with the platinum American Express card and the sports cars and the clothes, it was all a shoot. He was an arrogant guy. Chris was a good worker and he's always been nice to me. He was a good talker. He was a good heel, but he was, like, installed there. They only let guys work with the boys that they felt comfortable with, that wouldn't make them look bad.

Keller: What about the Freebirds at the time?

Cornette: I loved Terry Gordy. I loved him to death. Buddy Roberts was always hilarious. I never spent a lot of time around him, but he was great. Michael has always been different. For the longest time, that was a shoot. That's how the most successful wrestling gimmicks get over, is they're shoots. That was really the Freebirds you saw on Atlanta TV. But now Michael and Jimmy Garvin, those aren't the Freebirds. I think maybe they should have let it rest. Michael was always the guy who called the shots for the team. As a matter of fact, he led them around all over the country trying to be rock 'n' roll stars. At the time we were working four to six days a week and we would average about \$1000 a week which definitely ain't bad by today's standards. One week you would work four times and earn \$450 and the next week we'd work six days and earn \$1800, so you never could tell what was going to happen. The trips were

short, so it was like a paid vacation. But it was a really strange place.

Keller: What about Scandar Akbar?

Cornette: Akbar has always been really nice to me and he's a funny guy in person, but I think Bill Watts was the last person to get mileage out of Akbar as a manager. He just hasn't changed his deal in ten years.

Keller: When you were working *World Class*, did you have the itch to work on TBS?

Cornette: We wanted to hang around to see if anything was going to happen and after six months it became obvious that if we were going to do the main event thing we would be doing it by now. Finally, we heard Dusty was planning the "Great American Bash," so we gave our notice. Dusty would call every now and then, so finally we decided to go there. Then we got stuck in Atlanta for a few months, that was when they had taken over the Atlanta TV and were trying to make that territory separate, so we moved to Atlanta for three months. Then, all the way to Charlotte.

CHAPTER 6: GOING NATIONAL ON TBS

Keller: How did the first days in the NWA go? How was it different from your previous experiences?

Cornette: Dusty Rhodes said he wanted us over every night. He even had us winning battle royals and splitting the money. We knew the Rock & Roll Express was already there, so we knew sooner or later that was going to happen and hoped it would be good, but had no idea how good it would be. But they put us over like crazy for the first several months, gave us wins on TV and just gave me time to talk, and put us in a thing with Rocky King and Jimmy Valiant and Billy Graham, just to keep us busy. Finally, boom, when the thing with the Rock & Roll went, and it was actually too good, we drew such good money with them that Dusty & Magnum T.A. were nominally the top babyface team, the "America's Team," so he swerved us off of the Rock & Roll and put us against him for the Summer and houses dropped.

Keller: How was the experience working for the Rock & Roll Express different from working with The Fantastics?

Cornette: Well, they're two different

teams. They do things differently. The Fantastics were over as much in Dallas as the Rock & Roll were in the Carolinas. When I first got to Dallas, the security in Dallas was not all that hot, and the fans would come up and literally pull them off the ring because they were the first decent babyfaces they had seen in so long that weren't Von Erichs. So The Fantastics were over in Dallas like crazy, but it was never taken advantage of. The Rock & Roll



PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY (Photo by Wade Keller)

Express—and I loved Bobby Fulton to death, he's one of my best friends—had that something extra and they were used right for Crockett and for Watts. The only place that The Fantastics were able to go where they weren't following the Rock & Roll was Dallas and they got over with the people, but were never used right.

Keller: Fundamentally, how does your role as a manager differ from Paul E. Dangerously?

Cornette: You know, Paul E. tries to be too serious, I think. For me, I can't be that. I mean, when he quoted that Latin funeral thing on TV, to me, that's so serious people don't believe you're serious. Whereas everybody can identify with a loud-mouthed asshole, which me and Paul E. both are. But I won't come out and say

I'm going to kill somebody because everybody knows that's bullshit. So I think sometimes Paul E. tries to be too serious and structures his interviews too heavy and defeats his purpose.

Keller: Was there any professional jealousy between you two or was it strictly a healthy relationship for both of you?

Cornette: I was never jealous of Paul E. I can't speak for him, but I wouldn't imagine he was for me, but it was my idea that he come in the territory. Because we had said, "Boy, wouldn't it be great, Midnight vs. Midnight. When Dusty sat us down and said, "I won't hire them guys unless you all say so." That was mainly because Dennis screwed us around. We all said so, because we wanted to do the deal. I'm not trying to say I got Paul E. a job or whatever, but it was just the situation. We had been there for Dusty and done the job for Dusty. He wasn't going to screw us around because we wanted to do that. So it kept me on my toes. I enjoyed being a babyface and he's the only that could have switched me.

Keller: Between the Rock & Roll Express and Paul E. Dangerously, did you feel stagnated or were you always on a high?

Cornette: There were times that we had good programs going on, like the Road Warriors with the scaffold thing that drew money, or with Tully & Arn, even the Garvins. The only times was when we were with the New Breed, that was blah, but we always had that Atlanta TV that we could go out and just bullshit on and do our stuff and everything. It was always like they might not have had us on boiling all the time, but they kept us on the burner where we could do something at any point. For example, the thing with Tully & Arn. We had done basically nothing earlier that year, and then boom, the thing with Tully & Arn and we were selling out. It was Flair vs. Dusty and us vs. Tully & Arn. Shortly after us, it was the buyout and they wouldn't keep us on the burner. They stuck us in the deep freeze. And the longer that happens, the more of a chance you have of not being able to come strong with credibility and heat.

Keller: What is the most memorable moment of your pre-buyout days on TBS?

Cornette: The thing that I look back on the most of anything I've done in pro

wrestling is the deal with Watts at the last Stampede. It is the one and only time that Jim Cornette and The Midnight Express drew every single one of those houses and sold every single one of those buildings out and there wasn't another thing on the card that has anything to do with it. That's the only time. Even with Crockett, even with the Rock & Roll except on spot shows there was always other talent on the show such as Ric Flair, Tully & Arn, whatever. Those shows in Louisiana with Bill Watts and Dog, it was that match that drew and nothing else. And I don't think that any match in any territory will draw that kind of business again. It drew \$1.2 million for fourteen days. I mean, that's ridiculous. So that, I think, is the best thing we ever did.

CHAPTER 7: HEARING THE FANS' CHEERS

Keller: How did you have to change in order to become a babyface manager?

Cornette: I came out and admitted I had been a big jerk and a whimp and an asshole, but I said regardless of how rotten and crummy and stinkin' I've been, he's worse and if there's one person in the world I can whip, it'd be him. And the people said, "Hell, he's telling the truth. He is a no-good, dirty, stinkin', son of a bitch, but goddamn we hate the other guy worse. Then it became a hometown thing because Paul E. was new: "Hey, he may be a prick, but he's our prick."

Keller: Then you didn't change at all, you just made sure people knew that there was someone who was worse now?

Cornette: Oh, yeah, you change a little bit when you change the way you do your interviews and you change the way you work at ringside, but you try to do it in such a way that people believe you're still doing all that rotten stuff you used to do. Because when a heel switches babyface, they want to see him for one reason: To see him cheat as bad as he always had and beat up the guys they don't like. But you can't do that or else you don't let the heels get any heat, so you have to change things around a little bit, but the trick is to make the people not know you've changed.

Keller: Might you want to become a babyface manager again or was that something you really didn't like doing?

Cornette: Oh, I loved doing it. The only times I didn't like doing it was unfortunately when TBS came along and I didn't get a chance to flush it out like I wanted to. I can't rule out that I wouldn't do it again, but I wouldn't do it unless I thought it would do good. I wouldn't do it just because I wanted to do it. I'd have to think it would do business, and to do that, you need somebody to work off of.

Keller: We've been through the whys and hows of both of the times you left WCW in previous "Torch Talks," but what went through your mind the first time you left? Did you consider going to the WWF?

Cornette: Well, we ended up giving our notice when George Scott was booking. We figured we would go work some independent shows and see what happened. He wasn't going to be there forever. And I knew we would probably get a chance to come back if they straightened things out. At the time, I didn't know how bad it would eventually get. But actually they fired him and asked us back five days before we finished. We had given our one month notice and we were gonna finish up and all that good stuff, so we had already booked some dates from Dundee in Continental and then we were going to take some time off. Then they ended up firing Scott and calling us before we actually finished, but we had already planned on taking a vacation and doing those shows for Bill, so we said, "Look, we'll just stay out two or three months and come back when it might mean something.." Actually, we didn't have to sit and ponder too long on that one."

CHAPTER 8: JIM CORNETTE, THE PERSON

Keller: If you were eventually to do some radio, how would you change? Would you be Jim Cornette, the guy we see on TV?

Cornette: I think I would be more just like me. I wouldn't be a heel, I'd just be more natural. I mean, I'll climb on somebody in a heartbeat anyway, but I don't think people want to hear heel radio people, they just want to hear controversial radio people.

Keller: Have you ever thought of doing standup comedy?

Cornette: No, not really. That's awfully hard. Dennis Miller's Black & White special



JIM CORNETTE AND DR. MARK CURTIS
(Courtesy Hildebrand Collection)

is my favorite comedy special of all time, but that stuff's hard. And to do it right and everything, I couldn't do that. A challenge is one thing, but if I didn't think I could actually get great at it, I wouldn't... Well, I play cards sometimes, but I don't expect to be Amarillo Slim. Other than just jacking around, I don't think I'd do that.

Keller: Who is the real Jim Cornette? When you think of yourself, do you think of yourself as a really good person?

Cornette: Naw, I'm a dishonest creep (laughs). I don't know who the real Jim Cornette is anymore. You talk to me, so you tell me. That's me. I wouldn't knock anybody over the head and steal their wallet.

Keller: What do you like to do outside of wrestling when you have time to actually do something outside of wrestling?

Cornette: I'm a big video freak, and that's one of the things that I like about doing post-production on the TV show is I get to learn a lot about that in general, video and audio. I like to go to movies, I love to eat. See, this is the best of all worlds because my favorite vacation place is Gallanburg and I'm 45 minutes away. I love the mountains, I never go to the beach. I love dogs, I hate people.

Keller: What do you mean you hate people?

Cornette: Some people love to live in

cities. I can't stand it, I hate traffic, I hate being clogged up, I hate being in crowds. If I go to a movie, I'll sit in the last row so I don't have anybody behind me. I like restaurants that don't have any people in it. That's why I live out here in the woods, I don't care if I see a soul. If I'm home for four days, I don't care if I leave the house. I see enough of people when I work. I don't go out of my way outside of my work to cause any disturbances or be around any crowds or a bunch of people. But I love dogs. I'd have a hundred dogs if I could.

Keller: *How many dogs do you have?*

Cornette: Just two, and they're both females, so I hope I won't have any more for the time being.

Keller: *What breed?*

Cornette: West Island Terriers. Snuffles and Muffy. I've talked about Snuffles many times in the past. Muffy is a more recent addition to the family. Snuffles is now almost 6 and Muffy is about 3.

Keller: *Do you have any brothers and sisters?*

Cornette: No, that's why I'm so selfish.

Keller: *What do your parents do?*

Cornette: Well, my mom sits at home and counts her money. (laughs) No, not really. My father died in 1968. He was the vice president and business manager of the *Courier Journal* and *Louisville Times*. He was a newspaperman for 30 years. He started as a paperboy. He had his first story published in '37. You see, my father was older, World War II and the whole nine yards. But he started as a paper boy and ended up being the vice president of the company. The only way he could have gone further is if he was a member of the Bingham family which unfortunately genetics dictated that he wasn't. The Bingham family in Louisville was the equivalent of the Rockefellers. They owned the *Courier Journal*, the morning paper, the *Louisville Times*, the afternoon paper, WHAS-TV 11, the CBS station, WHAS AM radio and FM radio, and also a couple of publishing companies and about half the geography in Jefferson County. My mom has just basically looked after me and seen that I didn't drive her to total insanity all of these years.

Keller: *You talk about your "mama" a lot. This image was somewhat born out of truth?*

Cornette: Well, she's not setting the world on fire as far as being a millionaire. What happened was when Jerry Jarrett first approached me, he said, "You know, the hottest gimmick that I've ever seen was Gary Hart." I did Gary Hart's gimmick. When Gary Hart first got into the wrestling business, he was a rich mama's boy, which obviously age took him out of. And how else would you feasibly explain a teenage kid all of a sudden popping up and becoming a wrestling manager. Actually, it was pretty smart. It worked and we just took off with it. And my mom put a burglar alarm on her house thinking somebody was going to break in thinking she had a million dollars or something. That was the start of that.

Keller: *What did your mom think of you becoming a wrestling manager and what does she think of you now?*

Cornette: She's gotten a kick out of it and she likes that I'm doing something I like. She worries about me fighting with people or being out there trying to make people mad or getting on airplanes. She worries just like mothers worry about their kids. She gets a kick out of it.

CHAPTER 9: STORIES FROM MEMPHIS DAYS

Keller: *We spoke of Jimmy Hart earlier. What are some of your fondest memories from working with him in Memphis?*

Cornette: One time, when he and I were both working together, we had a match with Koko Ware. About the time the match was going to start, I said to Jimmy, "Aren't you going to get dressed?" He said, "I've gotta wear the chicken suit." "Jesus Christ, you're gonna work in a chicken suit?" He said, "Yeah. Now listen, this suit has to go back to the costume place so don't do too much." For some reason or another, whenever Jimmy was in a handicapped match, he never could do too much for some reason or another. He was sore some where or had a chicken suit or whatever. So I ended up puking every night trying to work so hard every night because he wasn't doing too much. It might have even been a rib. In fact, one night in Jonesboro, he had me splash Lawler like 17 times in a row to see how long it would take me to throw up. We were supposed to go 20 minutes of something. I finally told Jerry Jarrett,

"Please, I'm gonna throw up."

So anyway, we go out there and it's me and the world's biggest chicken against Koko Ware. We powder him and jumped him from behind and we always choked the guy with ropes. It was feasible then for two managers to get a babyface down. That was back in the days when babyfaces actually sold something. Jimmy, wearing this chicken suit, would hurt you more when he was your partner than when he'd wrestle you. He drew back one time to hit Koko and hit me with his wing and got feathers down my throat and I almost choked. So I'm putting the boots to Koko and I'd kick him eight or ten times and I'd be out of breath. And I'd go, "Jimmy, Jimmy!" So he'd kick with these webbed feet that were, like, 15 inches long. He was kicking the guy with webbed feet and every time he'd kick the guy, his beak would fall down from the top of his head down to his face. So then he'd pick his beak up so he could see, throw another webbed-foot kick, then his beak would fall down again. He'd repeat that four or five times, and then I'd take over again. Of course, we got beat then.

So then Lawler booked one of the only Lawler ideas I didn't care for. I think the guy's smart and all that, but this I didn't care for. It was me and Jimmy Hart against Bobby Eaton. We'd never won a match, so if we didn't win this match, we were going to throw out \$5000 to the crowd in cash. So we get there that night and I find out we're going to have The Assassin, Roger Smith, you know, Dirty Rhodes, he's had a million names. He's gonna somehow cause us to beat Bobby, with a loaded mask or something. So Lawler's back in the locker room and he's got like \$147 in one dollar bills. He says, "Here, help me crumple these up." We put the \$147 in crumpled up bills in a cardboard box. That was our \$5000. He said, "When the match is all over and Roger's helped you all win behind the referee's back, Jimmy and you, go grab the box, bring it into the ring, hold it above your head. Bobby will nail Jimmy Hart, then the Assassin, then he'll nail you. He'll grab the box, grab a handful of money, throw it over the top rope. He'll go to grab another handful of money. That's when you all stop him from behind, boom boom, grab the box and run. Now don't lose too much of my money! One handful is enough."

So, okay, it sounded feasible to us. So we went out there and had the match. I

think I had a broken bone in my toe because every time I bent it, it was like there was a needle in it. And my other ankle was sprained from a battle royal so I was waddling across the ring. I was talking while trying not to bend either my ankle or my toes on the other foot. And I'm waddling around and we have this match. The finish goes off according to plan. Bobby gets to the box of money, grabs one handful, throws it over the top rope. Well, the next thing you know, there's goddamn people hitting the ring from Cleveland, Ohio. First they were about eight years old, then they were fifteen, then they were 22. A guess about 40 people probably were in the ring. They were diving over the top rope and stepping on top of each other. The daggum security people couldn't hold them back. I'm hiding in the corner of the ring behind Roger Smith, terrified I'm going to get cut. Jimmy Hart's on the other side of the ring looking around like the Indians are attacking. I turned around and go, "Jimmy, come over here!" I figured Roger could protect us. So the next thing I know, I turn around, I didn't know what happened. Next thing I know, I'm sitting there in the middle of the ring which is totally empty except for Jimmy and Roger trying to help me up. Sam Lowe was the only guy who saw it, and he saw some guy catch me on the end of my chin and knock me out. Well, when I came to, there's nobody in the ring, there's no money, there's no box. They got everything. I've got the tape of the match, but it was taped with a floor camera, so as soon as you saw the fans start for the ring, you see the camera go over sideways and then somebody steps on top of it and the screen goes black. So I go back to Jerry Lawler and I said, "Jerry, don't have that match anymore because I ain't working it." That was the only match Hart and I ever won.

Keller: You asked me to remind you about the Terry Funk rib. What was that all about?

Cornette: I had loved Terry Funk for years. I was always a big fan of his. Back in 1982 when I first got started, I was managing Jesse Barr. You know, just like anyone who likes Terry Funk, I did Terry Funk imitations, both me and Eddie Gilbert. I got such a kick out of Funk when they brought him in in 1981 and he had that series of matches with Jerry Lawler that were just tremendous. They had everything, blood, guts, gore, violence, the whole nine



TERRY FUNK (Photo by Wade Keller)

yards. Their first match in Memphis where Lawler beat Funk with a chair outside the ring and got a countout win was absolutely one of the greatest matches ever in the history of wrestling. This is the goddamndest thing you'll ever see in your life. If you like Terry Funk or Jerry Lawler or just wrestling in general, you've got to see this match. So I'm managing Jesse Barr and we get to TV one morning. This was January 1983, I guess. They brought Funk back in to team with Lawler and Koko against Sabu the Wildman, who was also Koko Samoa, Bobby Eaton, and Carl Fergie in a six-man tag. We look at the TV sheets and it has Jesse Barr and the Masked Marauders, who were two softball buddies of Lawler, against Lawler, Koko, and Funk. So now Jesse's ready to give his notice. He's sure they're going to job him out because they team him with two job guys against the top stars. I'm gonna be there, too, because I was managing Jesse. And I didn't know it but it was a rib on me because they knew how much I liked Funk and everything. They had something planned out, but I don't know if they had the exact thing planned out.

Funk did an interview before that saying, "I don't like sissies. Jimmy Hart's a sissy. Bobby Eaton's a sissy. Lance Russell, are you a sissy? If you're a sissy, I'll slap

you're face. So we go out there, we're standing in the ring. There's Lawler, Koko, and Funk, and Funk looks at me, right? I'm standing in the ring and he goes over to Lance and says, "Lance, I think I see a sissy." Well, the camera goes back over to me and you can see me try to dig a hole in that daggum canvas. I'm in between the Marauders and hanging on Jesse Barr's neck. Funk chases me around the studio and completely out the front door. So they go about their match and I creep back in and I say, "That guy's crazy!" And meanwhile, they're hitting these guys with chairs, chains, bottle rocks, pots, pans, bricks, sticks, anything they can get a hold of. Finally, they beat these guys. I'm over behind Lance. I wouldn't get any closer than that and Funk looks out there and grabs a chair and lobs that chair over Lance and Dave's head and I barely ducked out of the way. He starts chasing me around the ring again. I run around one side. Koko jumps down and cuts me off. I turn around and there's Funk on the other side. I don't know about Terry Funk at this point. I mean I don't know what he's going to do if he catches me, but I'm going to see that he don't. I tried to dive in the ring. I got a hold of Jesse's ankles and Jesse's trying to pull me in. Funk put a hand in one of my pockets and ripped my pants straight down the side. He ripped them in two pieces and off they come. I roll across the ring in my underwear and run out of the studio door again. Funk meanwhile was standing there with my pants in his hand. And I had to come back later to do an interview. I liked it after I got out of there, but I had two peices of my pants and taped them together with athletic tape and go back out there with my pants taped around me.

Keller: Is that where Jimmy Hart got the idea to do that in the WWF all the time?

Cornette: No. They ripped his pants off nightly, just about.

Keller: Did they at least let him know ahead of time?

Cornette: They used to have these street fights where you had to have your clothes ripped off. The deal was, you'd go down to your underwear. Well, Jimmy Hart was in a bunch of those and they used to always pull his underwear off. They would actually pull them all the way down and off his ankles. He covered himself up with his

hands. He'd grab his underwear one end of his underwear in front of him and the other end around back of his in between his legs and he'd run back to the dressing room like that. They had a stock show one time in Indiana and the headline in the newspaper was "Nude Wrestling At High School." There was a big stink when they found about it. They actually preached about it at church when they found out about it up there. It was a little small town. They had birds flying around in the bathroom of the high school gym. They made such a big stink that the police wanted to press charges, but they couldn't decide whether to press charges against the stripper or the strippee. And the only names they had were "Nightmare" and "Speed" at that point. They were really Danny Davis and Ken Wayne. They were going to swear out warrants against Mr. Nightmare and Mr. Speed and Mr. Dutch Mantel and Mr. Dream Machine.

Keller: Now we're up to November of 1983.

Cornette: Bill Watts came to Memphis at this time and at the time, I had been doing nothing. It was to the point where I'd be booked maybe on Sunday somewhere and then I wouldn't be booked in Memphis, but I'd be booked in Batesville, Mississippi on Tuesday. I knew I was only going to make \$50 for Batesville, Mississippi. So I would always ask Lawler if I could make Memphis. "Please, can I make Memphis? It will be on the way." Then I could pick up an extra 75 bucks. At that point I was working the opening match and I was out of there. It's like I wasn't making what the wrestlers made then. I also think they were trying to give me a hint or something. But I got tired of asking if I could make Memphis. One time it backfired on me. I was booked in one of Buddy Wayne's towns, I think Hellena, Arkansas which was 300 miles from Nashville, which was where I was living. I wasn't booked for Memphis. So I called Buddy and said, "I'm booked in Hellena on Tuesday, and I hate to say this, but I don't have enough money for gas to get down there. I'm gonna have to come by myself because everyone else is in Memphis. And I'm not booked in Memphis on Monday." I said that thinking he'd say, "Well, don't worry, I'll call and make sure they book you for Memphis." Instead, he said, "Don't worry, you don't have to make Hellena."

So, anyway, Watts come up there and

all of a sudden from where I was doing nothing, that night I was in about three matches and I was in the finish of all of them. And I wasn't smart enough at this point to realize that they were auditioning me out. "Maybe you'll like this guy, Mr. Watts?" was basically what they were saying. The first thing I did was something with "Cowboy" Frasier. I did something with him to make sure he won. Then I was with Norvell Austin and Dennis Condrey against Stan Lane and Steve Keirn for the World Tag Team Title. At the time, I didn't have a tennis racket. So they gave me one of Jimmy Hart's canes. At that point, I was supposed to jump in when Stan or Steve had one of them pinned and whop him with the cane and dive out and switch the title to Dennis and Norvel. This made the Fabs so mad that later on when I was out with The Blues Brothers, Porkchop Cash, and Troy Graham against the Rock & Roll Express, the Fabulous Ones beat the crap out of me. They gave me a stuffed piledriver off the apron onto the floor, hit me with the ringpost that holds the barrier rope up. They goosed me once. It was so bad that the babyfaces carried me out to save them from being charged with murder or something. I guess all of this was an audition. That was the last night I was in Memphis, I think. They told me I had to come to TV all bandaged up. The next Saturday I came to TV with a neckbrace on, I had my head wrapped up. I stopped about 20 miles out of town to put all this stuff on because I was driving myself. I had my arm in a sling. I come out to TV and there's Jimmy Hart standing there and he says, Well, Jimmy Cornette's a little under the weather this week. Then they had me sitting in a chair at ringside and stagger to my feet and walking like a mummy I used my one good arm and I pulled myself onto the apron and distracted the referee.

CHAPTER 10: ON TO LOUISIANA. WE AIN'T SEEN NOTHING YET

Keller: When did you find out Bill Watts wanted you in his promotion?

Cornette: A week or so later I was at a spot show. Dennis Condrey walked up to me. I had known Dennis for a long time. He and Phil Hickerson were one of the greatest tag teams I'd ever seen back to '75. I had never really ridden with him. We weren't

close friends. And he walked up to me and said, "I gotta talk to ya'." And I say okay. And he says, "No, over here. Follow me." So we're walking trying to find a room by ourselves. I said, "Geez, Dennis, where are we going." And he said, "Louisiana." I said, "What!" He said Bill Watts wanted me, him, and Bobby to come to Louisiana. Dundee was going to be the booker and he wanted us to go and be a team. I'm thinking to myself this can't be true. He said we could make between 50 and 100 thousand dollars. I'm going, "Come on, Dennis. Jesus Christ. That's crazy." And he said, "No, it's true and he wants us to be a big heel team. The only thing was Watts didn't have a chance to hear me talk. But I guess Dundee told him. By this time I was doing okay. I said, "Okay, well let me know." Next thing I knew, Watts flew us down there for TV. I'd have to get my book to remember the exact date, but I think it was the day before Thanksgiving in 1983. Because when we got back, we all ate Thanksgiving dinner over at Dundee's house.

A couple weeks later Watts flew us down again and we taped a few more. I'm like flabbergasted by this whole thing. I'm going, "What the hell is this going to lead to?" You know, the Irish McNeil Boys Club, Boyd Pierce, Jim Ross, Bill Watts, and the whole Hee Haw gang. I'm just flabbergasted. That was the first time I'd ever seen Ernie Ladd in person. He was bigger than a daggum elephant. They had a lot of big guys. What I think clicked was they brought a lot of small guys that could move around and they changed the whole style and the people didn't notice. So we did these TVs and we were the first people from Tennessee to go in. I think Terry Taylor started in January and the Rock & Roll started in March. I think with the trade, Jarrett got Jim Neidhart, Rick Rude, Masai Ito, and Hacksaw Higgins. It was two for two as far as future stardom.

We started full time on Christmas night in New Orleans. So that meant on the 23rd I had to pack my Datsun with everything I could fit in it and left the rest of the stuff at Bobby's house because he had a house in Nashville. So off we go to Louisiana and it was cold. Every time I've ever moved it's been a near-death experience. Dennis is driving his van with his Christmas tree in the front seat. We're all loaded down. We got there in New Orleans. When I stepped into the downtown Municipal Auditorium, I thought I stepped into another world. This

was unlike anything I had ever seen. It was just a different atmosphere. Whereas in Tennessee, the people are always rabid and excited, these people in New Orleans were violent. They used to have a lot of problems with fights with fans and people jumping into the ring in the early- and mid-seventies, but I only got nailed with a fan three or four times the whole time I was there, which wasn't a bad average I guess. Besides that, Watts went for heat, heat heat. Not just excitement, but anger heat. Add to that, as I looked at the maps of the road we were driving on, I realized there were no interstates practically. The roads were rough, the towns were rough, everything was rough. But I was, like, excited.

So New Year's Eve we were in Oklahoma City. I said to myself going into that building, "This is crazy. Look at the size of the building. It's New Year's Eve, there's gonna be nobody at the matches. I've never heard of running on New Year's Eve. I walked in there and the house was \$65,000, the biggest house I had ever seen. Well, I had seen one bigger at the Omni, but that was as a fan. The rest of the territory besides Ok' City was really down. I guess, New Orleans, the night we were there, did about 20 grand. We did Tulsa and it did like 10. Little Rock was doing 10. Shreveport was down. They had recycled the talent, and there's only so many times you can recycle them. They had some fresh talent still, like Butch Reed and Hacksaw Duggan always drew. Dog was still pretty hot. But they just needed a change.

They had never seen this stuff, so Dundee talked Watts into doing some things. Watts had tremendous business sense, but I doubt that he would have done some of these things had Dundee not talked Watts into it. Presented in a serious way, some of Dundee's corny ideas worked. A blindfold battle royal. Now that's the corniest things there is. But they presented it in the Mid-South tradition as 20 superheavyweights blindfolded where the only way to be blindfolded was to be tossed over the top rope onto the floor. Literally, somebody was going to be killed. And it drew. The people literally thought something was going to happen. They didn't think the wrestlers could see through the hoods. Stuff like that. The tarring and feathering. It wasn't dumping a bucket of feathers on someone and making someone look like a chicken. It was going back to the days when the Klan and the Civil War days

when they'd tar and feather someone and run them out of town on a rail. A lot of those people had relatives—distant, mind you—that that stuff had happened to. That got so much heat that they tarred and feathered Bobby's car outside of the hotel. I mean, I could tell you stories on Louisiana for three days.

In January we did our first angle with Mr. Wrestling II and Magnum T.A. And that thing took off and the houses literally doubled. It would be Dog against Butch, us against Magnum & II, and I remember Houston went from \$29,000 to \$41,00 to \$56,000 to \$65,000. I've got all the programs. We did the deal where we tarred and feathered them. We did it because they were chicken and wouldn't give us a title match, right? So we decided to show them what chickens they were. And boom, we tarred and feathered that daggum Magnum T.A. and people got hot. Watts kept putting heat on us, Dundee kept putting heat on us, we would win all of our matches with Magnum and II. They would be non-title matches where the loser got ten lashes. We'd really lash them and the people were irate. We started having problems with the people right off the bat because, for one thing, Dennis and Bobby being normal size, and me, well look at me, they knew they could take us, or they thought they could. So they tried every week. With Nikolai Volkoff, nobody's going to jump his ass, right? But one of them did. Nikolai Volkoff and Krusher Kruschev hung Terry Taylor one time with a noose over the top rope. This guy in Alexandria one time jumped the rail, took out his hunting knife, and cut Taylor down and in the process cut through Nikolai's boot laces.

One night in Biloxi, we had screwed the Rock & Roll Express with my shoe and Jesus Christ, people came after us. This guy punched me and I punched him back. Then this big old farmer came after me from behind and Bobby front face-locked him. This guy must've weighed 350. He picked up Bobby like a daggum rag doll and started shaking him around and had one hand around his head and the other in the guy's eyes and neither one of them would let go and this guy cleared out three rows of ringside trying to shake Bobby off. We're trying to hit the guy and the only thing we can hit is his back because he's so big. Carl Fergie, the referee, was down trying to save my tennis rackets from being stolen by somebody. This old man grabs me and I

punched and knocked the cigar out of his mouth. Then he reached into his pocket and so I'm trying to kick him in the nuts and then cops got ahold of him. I could just see myself with a knife sticking out of my chest about a foot long. Then this women jumped on Dennis's back and he was having a hell of a time fighter her off.

Buddy Landell used to ride with us a lot because he'd work midway through the card and then stay to the end with us because he had to help us fight our way back. Seriously. So in Tulsa, which was the worst place I used to wear a bullet proof vest in Tulsa not because I thought I was going to get shot because if somebody shot me I'd die of fright anyway — yes, too, and that was

a row in Tulsa. There, what a row in Tulsa. Under this, not cutout in the rooms. In the way out. The Fantastics. I they clotheslined him going to beat him. This guy from the other side of the ring jumped the rail. I thought he was going to jump in the ring, but he didn't. He started coming my way. He was coming after me. I rolled in the ring and as he followed me in the ring, Dennis and I each caught him with kicks to the face and we opened both of his eyes. This guy rolls back down to the concrete, the cops snatch him up, and I mean he's bleeding heavy. As the cops are dragging him out, we had to get out of there. As soon as we jumped out of the ring, somebody threw a beer in my face and I couldn't see at all. So I just start swinging at people. Then Bobby and Dennis are swinging at people. Then here comes Buddy Landell. The cops are still with us, and they're hitting them with the sticks, and they're dragging them off, but there's more people than there are cops. We're almost all the way back and Buddy nails one guy, then he nails another guy. One of the cops had a guy front face-locked and I kicked him so hard his ass was staring me in the face. But I kicked him so hard, I sprained my shin. Then a guy jumped off the balcony and he met Buddy and they both fell onto the floor and slipped on beer and busted their ass.

Keller: And that's how Bobby Eaton got inspired to come off the top rope, right?



BOBBY EATON (Photo by Wade Keller)

next show we went to the fairgrounds and they brought in the Tulsa or County Sheriff's Department. They were old, 40, 50, 55, 60 years old and they were all like a head shorter than me. And these guys got the hell beaten out of them because the fairgrounds was worse than the goddamn Assembly Center. The fairgrounds was worse than the Assembly Center because the Fairground Building was older and it was set up for rodeos and tractor pulls and stuff like that and these people were all drunk in this building. Every single one of them. One of the sheriffs got a chair rung around his head. So the next time sent the big, young guys.

If you remember from the old UWF shows, we had no protection or railing to get to the ring and then there was a railing around the ring and a cop at each corner. Gradually, if you remember, it got to where they had the cattle shoot you'd come out of. It was wooden on each side, five feet tall where nobody could touch you and once you got to the ring and the cops were parolling it like, walking around it constantly during every match. I didn't want to be there and I didn't want to be involved in the finish. I would stand there and lean against the ringpost and they were still ready to climb over the railings to get me.

I'll tell ya' two more Tulsa stories. The first time anybody got me there we had just done something to II and T.A. and we were leaving the ring and the cops were surrounding us. This sonovabitch started from the balcony to get a running start, dove over the cops' backs, and caught me from the side right in the nose with his fist. Both of my nostrils started bleeding at the same time. And Bobby carried the racket on the way out because he cleared the way. So I had a little can of mace in my coat—you needed every advantage you could get.

Keller: Talk about job hazards. Both mace and a loaded tennis racket to protect you!

Cornette: And the racket was actually loaded at the time. In Tulsa one time they threw a real horseshoe at us one time, it weighed about three pounds and I carried it with me since because I figured it was good luck since it didn't hit anybody. So the tennis racket has a horseshoe in it and a chain wrapped around the edge and the whole thing is put together with duct tape. Oh, and I took a cookie sheet and cut out a

tennis racket shaped piece of metal and put it on one side. Many times it was actually loaded.

Keller: I bet a lot of people never thought that was really loaded.

Cornette: Well, Dennis forgot one time and hit Ricky Morton flat on the back and nearly killed him. I used to just use it to jab when it was loaded. You could bend a stop sign in half with this sonovabitch.

Anyway, so Bobby had the racket and this guy nails me and stuns me to the point where I got to the mace but somebody knocked it out of my hand. I grab this guy in a headlock and he's got me by the waist and he's pushing me toward the locker room. I figure, well, that's where I want to go anyway. Dennis is behind me kicking this guy in the ribs and the cops are trying to get him off of me and Bobby is trying to hit him with the racket and I'm trying to find my mace. We all fell down in a heap ten or fifteen feet outside of the dressing room area. And Grizzlie Smith comes down and grabs the guy by the hair and just then Bobby brought the racket down and laid Grizzlie open from stem to stern. I'm trying to get in the guy's eyeballs, Dennis is still kicking at him, and the cops are trying to keep the other people away and that goddam Bill Watts comes out and says, "Get in the dressing room! Now!" And Watts grabbed that guy with two hands by the hair and drug him—and the guy was about 250—all the way back to the dressing room, swung him up against the wall—wait, he was standing on the guy's head with both feet, I swear to God, and leaning up against the wall to keep his balance. It was a good thing he was wearing tennis shoes and not his cowboy boots or he would have killed the guy. Then he swung the guy up against the wall and was trying to hit him, but the guy kept blocking it. So he slapped the guy's left hand against the wall and said, "Here, Grizzlie, hold this." Grizzlie held this arm and Watts just nailed him. Then he said, "Any time you think you can kick a wrestler's ass, you just let us know." And he had the cops dump him out back I guess in an alley somewhere and we never heard a thing from him. I only got one lawsuit from all of this sordid nonsense. Now you can't breathe on anybody.

Keller: What about the final Tulsa story?

Cornette: Okay, the night we wrestled

Cornette: Right. So Bobby smeared this guy. We finally get through the archway and the cops are still trying to restrain the people. The original guy who started this entire mess and almost got us killed is lying unattended leaned up against a wall. It looked like an Alfred Hitchcock movie. I'm hot, because this guy nearly got us killed. So I go over there and started putting the boot to him, kicking him in the head. I said, "Come on, Bobby." Well, that's not like Bobby, he didn't want to kick the guy. Well, the cop at the back door—they usually put the oldest guy at the back door—he walks up and tells us to leave the guy alone. He's like the referee pushing us away. Dennis has my belt still wrapped around his fist. Dennis came in behind this cop's back, looked to the right, looked to the left, and drilled him right in the face. So this was like our fourth or fifth straight time having some kind of bruhaha in Tulsa.

The next show, the internal affairs people from the police department were down there investigating police brutality. One of the people that got beat up was a highway patrolman's son. And I told them, "Hey, they were just trying to save our lives. These people were fixing to kill us." Well, they kicked the police force out of doing the Tulsa matches. So they got the sheriff's department.

As I recall, I think this was the same time—this all blurs after a while—but the

Watts, April 1984, we had done the angle, which we will get to in a minute. It was in the Tulsa Fairgrounds, it is supposed to seat 7500 people and it had 9000. It was like pushing your way through at a busy party and everybody was drunk. Here we go, we had just done \$100,000 in Oklahoma City that afternoon with the same match. Now we go in and it's like \$75,000 or \$80,000 that night and we're going to wrestle Junkyard Dog, the Mid-South's most popular wrestler, and Cowboy Bill Watts, who these people would die for. And Jiminy Christ, I knew on my way out there, I knew this was bad. Bobby and Dennis were, like, "Oh, God!" But we sit out there and we had good matches with Watts because he knew how to work. He'd sell, he sold like crazy. His psychology was great. Dog was Dog, but the people loved him. So at the beginning of the match when they were kicking us all over the ring and the people were going nuts and I liked it too—"Oh, good, the people are happy." But then when we took over on him, Watts sold like crazy. He started selling like he was going to the electric chair. Oh my God, and I'm thinking to myself, "If they can get a helicopter to air lift us out of this ring, then we will live." And if I live, then, God, I quit the wrestling business. So finally he beat us and the stipulation was that they were going to strip me down and put me in my mother's pink dress. So Bobby and Dennis have both juiced, he got juice on both of them, beat Dennis, threw Bobby over the top rope onto Dennis and then escorted them out. Then he jerks me in, slaps me around, strips my clothes off, Dog spansks me, and puts me in a dress. How much heat do you think I would have at this point? When I hit that floor for the cops to take me back to the ring, they looked at me and said, "Run!" Now, that put a lot of confidence in me. We've got to go 100 feet at least to the dressing room door with nothing to keep these drunk Tulsa rednecks back. I've got a tennis racket, dress shoes, wearing a pink dress. And the cops grabbed me up and got all around me and all three chased. But the people started tripping the cops, so I started losing them one by one. Finally, I look around and I've got one cop who's got me by the arm swinging his stick at people to get away from me and all of a sudden, he's gone. He just disappeared. So I've got my tennis racket and I'm swinging it like Paul Bunyan out in front of me to spread these people out. They were trying to trip me but I was

running so fast, I wouldn't go down. You know how you can get going so fast? So I'm spreading these people apart. I'm running in this dress, looking like Tiny Tim or something. Watts had pulled his Rolls Royce—because there was a terrible thunder storm that night—he's pulled his Rolls Royce into the back of the fairgrounds coliseum. It's parked right there at the entranceway to the dressing room area, a beautiful Rolls Royce. There's Jim Ross, spread eagle on the roof of that Rolls Royce, waving me away. "Get away from the car! Get away from the car," because they're throwing bottles and cans and cups of ice and anything they can. I'm about to be killed and they're worried about the car! So I run right past that Rolls Royce and it sounded like machine gun fire hit the hood of that thing! I went to the hotel, sat on the bed, and said, "I can't believe I made it through that."

Keller: Is there anywhere where the protection was good?

Cornette: In Lake Charles, the cops were tremendous there. There were about 12 of them and they would surround you and take you to the ring. The people in Lake Charles were sadists. When the Freebirds were there, they had so much heat, that they used to put Drano in water guns and try to squirt them in the eyes. The Birds used to drive into town and go to the police station. They'd leave their car there and drive to the matches in a police car. The people used to knife the tires on the police car. They used to take us out of there with the K-9s. There would be three or four hundred people waiting on us outside the building. They would get the German Shepherds out and those people would scatter when those German Shepherds came out. And they would get us to our van, but as soon as we got out of the parking lot, we were on our own, right? So the people would follow us to the Interstate and there was a three-lane interstate right out of Lake Charles and there would be a car on each side of us and Dennis would have to pull out his gun, show them he had it, and they would finally back off.

So in Lake Charles, they pretty much protected us. Monroe wasn't bad. Shreveport wasn't too bad. Little Rock, Arkansas was pretty hairy. There wasn't a lot of room around the ring and the people were pretty fierce. But there was this one big cop, he must have weighed 375 pounds. In

fact, one of the other cops is the one who sold me the bullet proof vest. This guy would bearhug me after the match and he would back down the aisleway with me so he could watch me. Nobody could touch me and he was so big, nobody could get around him. I felt safe near him.

In Jackson, Mississippi, we had a couple of good ones. This old man grabbed my racket one time and tried to have a tug-of-war with me. He was old, about 75, but he was a strong old bastard. I didn't want to kick him in the face because I thought they'd really get me for beating up this old man, but at the same time he wasn't going to let go of this racket. It took three or four police to get him off. Another time another guy nailed me. You see, these people were legitimately afraid of this racket. I would rear the racket back and legitimately five or six 18, 22 year old guys rove over a row of seats to get away from it because they had seen this racket do so much damage, and they believed it.

Houston, Jimminy Christ. Houston was horrifying sometimes because those people always came armed. They would have bottles or something. When you left ringside to head to the back, there was a large open area where nobody was allowed, but the balcony was still full. You had to go under that to get in the dressing room door. They used to throw bottles and other stuff. It looked like we were reenacting a scene from *Combat*, ducking under hand-grenades. We almost had a riot there one night. We were wrestling II and T.A. again. We had Wrestling II down in the ring and Bobby and Dennis were beating him with the racket and I had T.A. hung upside down in the ropes hanging by his leg and I was whipping him with his belt. We were supposed to stop when Joel Watts got on the microphone and threatened to suspend us. He was the referee. But the people were making so much noise, he did it and we didn't hear him. So we kept beating on these guys. I've got this on tape. Paul Boesch—I just loved him, I thought he was great, he even came to my wedding at his own expense and everything. He was just a super guy. He came out there and the cops were all surrounding me so I knew I was safe, and poor Magnum, he's just grinning and bearing this the best he can because I've nearly whipped him to death, and then I feel this hand on my shoulder. At the same time, the people all took a deep breath. I turned around and it was Paul Boesch and

he said, "Get out of here now!" As I watched the tape back, I realized if it had gone on another 30 seconds the people would have moved in and killed us. But when they saw Paul Boesch come out there, it was like a collective sigh of relief. When he put his hand on my shoulders, they knew it was going to be all right. I never knew anybody to have so much power over people in a town in all my life. That's why when they lost him with his connection with wrestling in Houston, they never drew a house again.

One time, I had my head shaved I was wearing a hood. And Duggan pulled my hood off and I grabbed it back. Me and Hercules—because I managed Hercules for a while there, too—we're running down the aisleway and this guy steals my hood. And it's the only hood I've got. He takes off down ringside and before I really thought about it, I chased him. I snatched him by the shirt, kicked him in the nuts, and snatched my hood back. Then I realized I'm about 15 feet in the middle of ringside. I thought, "Oh, God!" Then I saw a couple bodies fly over my head and it was Hercules. He snatched one guy and flung him away and grabbed me and flung me over his shoulder and saved my life.

Houma, Louisiana. Jesus Christ, if there ever was a place where they could shoot Paradise Alley and not have to build a set, this was the place. I have never seen a place like this in my life. The first time I went there I was petrified because it's a rec center. You go in the side door and you're in the arena. It's not really an arena. It's a big room with a lot of chairs set up and it's got a balcony that the people had to stand in because if you put chairs in it, the people wouldn't be able to see the ring. It's just a loft. This is south of New Orleans, they're all drunk, and when you go in the dressing room it's like a cement block room and there's no way out except in the arena. There's no way out. If you got stuck, you're stuck. So we had several doozies there. One time, this guy came up and stood on me and he was like 14, and I cursed him out. It may have been a mistake, because when we got out to the car, it was me and Dennis because Bobby was riding with Dundee. So we got out to the car and we're putting away our stuff in the trunk. This guy comes up and throws this full softdrink can at Dennis and hits Dennis in the head. Dennis grabbed him by the arm and twisted his arm over

and drove him down by the shoulder and then kicked him in head. By the time we did that, there were about 15 more of them around us. We don't have a gun and we don't have a chance in hell. We're out in the parking lot in the dark in Houma, Louisiana and there's 15 Cajuns planning to kill us. One of the babyfaces, I can't remember who it was, but they got in their car and saw what was going on. They started their car,



DENNIS CONDREY (Photo by Wade Keller)

turned up the bright lights, and drove up. We were behind our car and they were out in the middle of the roadway. They drove up in the middle of them causing them to scatter out giving us time to get away from them, get into our car, and get away from. By that time some of the cops had come out of the building, I guess somebody ran to get them. So we got out of there.

Another time we were with Hercules when he was teaming with Doc. I got the football helmet when Doc was using the football helmet as a gimmick. I think they were against the Rock & Roll, which was the downfall of many a heels because they had to fight the people. God, the way that Ricky Morton could sell. So I'm in the corner and we get out and it was like I was first down the aisle and Doc & Herc were right behind me. People from reverse order from the first row, then the second, then the third row started jumping on them. Well, I turned around and we're backing to the dressing

room and Doc and Herc are side-by-side and if anyone jumps on them, they'll take them and fling them clear away. If I could just take the helmet and ding them over Doc and Herc's back. But those are the two guys to have on your side in a fight.

Galiano, Louisiana, look that one up on your map sometime. If you go south from New Orleans and to the Houma area, it's down on that little tip. There's only one road to the town because it's on the little tip and it's right next to the bayou and it's right next to the water.

Keller: So *Chainsaw Massacre VIII* could be taped there, then?

Cornette: Let me tell ya', the people down there were so Cajun, the woman who sold our merchandise was Cajun, but she couldn't understand these people! Did you ever see the movie "Southern Comfort?"

Keller: No.

Cornette: Check it out sometime and you'll know what I'm talking about, practically. It's about National Guardsmen that get stuck in Southern Louisiana and piss off the locals and they all get killed. A lot of these people legitimately do not speak English. I'm not kidding. They speak Cajun which is a French-Canadian, well, I don't know what the hell it is actually. You've heard of Pig Latin? Well, this is like Pig French. Everybody, they start drinking on Friday night and they don't stop until Monday morning. We had to wrestle Junkyard Dog & Magnum T.A. Jimmy Garvin, I'll never forget, was over with Precious to wrestle Chris Adams from Dallas in the semi-final and Jimmy Garvin and Adams had a scientific match. He wouldn't break one rule. Precious went out there and got the jacket and then returned to the locker room and guys were pinching her.

So we get out there, and before we even get out there, a guy has thrown a beer in Bobby's face, blinded him. The guy's about 280, he's ripped his shirt off and wants to fight. Bobby's trying to blindly grab me to wipe his eyes on my jacket. I throw Dennis the tennis racket, I've got my mace, the security we had were local guys who were sponsoring the event—they'd just as soon kill ya' as look at ya', anyway, so they weren't helping. During the match, this big guy stood behind me and I just hugged the ringpost all the way through the match. We



CORNETTE AND HIS TENNIS RACKET
(Photo by Wade Keller)

were supposed to get disqualified for throwing Magnum over the top rope. Dennis grabbed him, threw him over the top rope, and we were half way to the dressing room by the time he hit the floor. They locked us in the dressing room and said, "We gonna lock you in here naw and you gonna be here 45 minutes, maybe an hour, then we will a come getch ya and we take ya out, okay?" So we sat in that room locked for about 35, 40 minutes and they cleared the building and got almost everybody out of the parking lot, then they surrounded us and walked us to our car, surrounded our car and walked our car out to the road.

Let's see. Alexandria and Pineville is where we lived, right in the middle of the state. Let me tell you, I think I'd rather live in the Federal Penitentiary than live in that town. That place was horrible, 50 years behind the times. Jesus Christ, we had trouble with those people, too. I drilled this one guy. He swung at me and I caught him three times between the eye with the racket. Grizzle Smith used to get so mad at me because I'd always club these guys, I'm not about to fight them fair. You never know whether they had a knife or what. Most of them had it.

Keller: *Poor Paul E. Dangerously is stuck with a mere phone.*

Cornette: I've got the reach with Paul E. on his phone.

Keller: *You've picked the right gimmick.*

Cornette: That was exactly why I did it. Because when we went to Louisiana—and I tell you this for the first time ever, now it can be revealed where I got the idea for the racket—the guys had told me how bad the people were. I had seen a movie, one of those teenage exploitation movies where this rich kid in the group was always carrying around a badminton racket. And I thought, whew, now this could have a dual purpose. I could use it as a gimmick in the matches, I could use it to attract attention. It had never been done before, and at the same time I could hit these people in the head with it. So I asked Watts if I could use it and he liked the idea, so that's how I got started with this.

I've gotto tell you, one time In Baton Rouge they were real rough there, too. Remember I said Bobby Eaton carried the racket at first. This is why he stopped carrying the racket. There weren't any guard rails at this time. We got guard rails later on but it didn't help us when we had the most heat. We just had to mill through the crowd. This one guy hit Bobby on the back of the head and Bobby turned around and had him by the neck against the bleachers which were folded up. The guy's feet were above the ground and the guy was only about 15, so Bobby let him go, but another guy came up from behind and nailed Bobby, so Bobby chases the guy. When stuff like this happens, you don't think. Buddy Landel ran from the dressing room and ran through the crowd and field tackled the guy. He's on the guy's knees and he's got his arms behind the guy's back and Dennis came up and football kicked him up under the jaw, boom! snaps his head back and Bobby follows with his racket right down across the top of his head, boom! That's when I had the cookie sheet, the chain, and the horse shoe. It was a wooden racket and broke the frame and bent the metal in the perfect shape of a head. I saved this for years until I kept it in the back of a closet and it got mildew so I threw it away. By the time I got there, because this guy got in my face, I whipped my mace out and said, "I can make you wish you were never born in 3 seconds" and the guy runs off. I would have hit the guy, too, but by the time I got there, the guy was already dead in the water. The cops grabbed the guys by the heels and dragged him out of the building like that. So we got back to the dressing room and I looked at the racket and I almost

had a fit. I loved that thing and Bobby said, "I'm never going to carry that thing again, I'm likely to kill somebody." And he's never touched that thing again outside the ring.

CHAPTER 11: THE LAWSUIT

Keller: *You mentioned earlier that you only had one lawsuit out of all of this. What happened? It could not have been worse than what you've already said, could it?*

Cornette: Well, in Baton Rouge and I got arrested at the same time. We got a rail to separate the people from us going to the locker room. This one guy jumps up on the rail as I'm coming down the aisleway. He leans on his left hand and swings his right. I see his fist coming and I dodge it and I draw back and nail him with the racket... two, three, maybe four times (laughs). He's back in his seat, but the seats right there. So when I drew back, I hit one of the cops in the head. Dundee also tackles the guy and he's drilling him with punches. If his worked punches are any example of how hard he can throw a punch, the guy was in worse danger from Dundee than he was from me.

But anyway, we get back to the dressing room. The cop's mad because I hit him. I said, if you had been between me and him instead of me in between you and him, I wouldn't have hit nobody. He didn't appreciate that so much, so he wanted to cite me and Bobby, but Bobby slipped away and I don't think he ever saw him again. He put down my name and address and issued a warrant out for me for aggravated assault or whatever. So I swore one out for the other guy. I figure fair is fair. They were trying to find Dundee, but they never saw him again. He stopped coming to Baton Rouge for months. They were asking, "Where is that little guy?"

So I had to go down and Grizzly Smith told me I had to be booked and finger printed and everything. I told Grizzly, "Hey, I'm not going down to the police station in Baton Rouge by myself. Now you come on with me Griz or you're in Greenwood, Mississippi tomorrow night and I just keep on going and be in Louisville before anybody knows what happened to me, because that's in the right direction anyway." He said, "Okay, I'll go with ya'." Griz always took care of ya'. Bill Watts always had somebody there to take care of the boys. He didn't just leave them out there

like spare pricks at the wedding.

So I have to take my day off. I had 47 days off in 1984 working in Louisiana. Now, 15 of those didn't count because we finished December 15 of '84. So take 15 off and that's 32. I took 8 days off after I caught mono. I caught mono and took 8 days off. That knocks it down to 24. Then I was sick two other days. So actually we had 22 days off all year. So on one of my days off I go to jail. So I go down there, they book me, fingerprint me, and take my picture and everything. Grizzly is going up there to arrange my bond. So I told him, "Grizzly, don't take all day, now." So they put me in a cell. I didn't know about that, stupid me, I'd never been arrested. I figured they were going to finger print me, take my picture, and book me and get all this information and then I get to leave. So they tell me to go to the cell. I say, "Cell? If I'd a known that I'd a never a come down here." Well, the guy didn't know I had turned myself in or anything, so he looked at me like I had a turd hanging out of my mouth. "You would've never come here if you knew you were going to jail? What does that mean?"

So I looked around and there was some characters and they already knew who I was. They were all black and all talking amongst themselves. I saddled over to one of the cops and said, "You'd do me a real big favor if you put me in a cell by myself, because a lot of these people know who I am and they probably don't like me." So he put me in a cell right in front of—well, if it had been a hospital, it would have been a nurse's station—the police desk where they could keep an eye on people, although half the time there wasn't nobody there. So I'm sitting there and they close the cell and there's somebody on the bench across from me. His feet were sticking out but his head was covered up, he was under a blanket. I know he was alive because he was breathin', but I was in that cell for an hour, hour-and-a-half and he never moved a muscle. So guess they figured it was safe to put me in there. So I'm sitting there in a jail cell in Baton Rouge thinking, all of this because a guy takes a swing at me. Finally, Grizzly gets me released and everything and they come down and get me. He had a lot of pull out there because he said he would take responsibility so they didn't charge any bond or anything. Have you ever been arrested?

Keller: No.

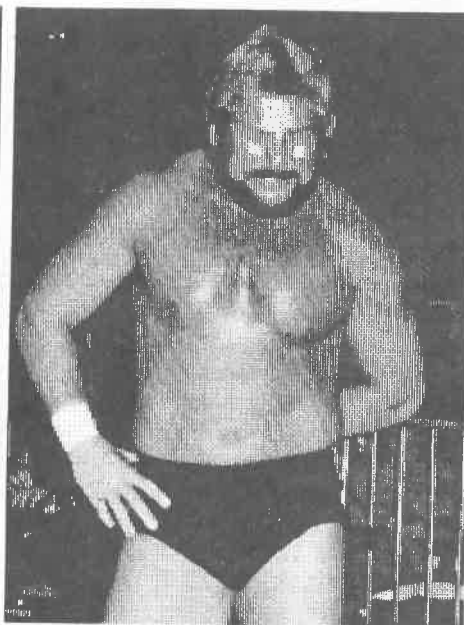
Cornette: Well, they take everything,

all your valuables and they put it in an envelope and seal it up and put it in a safe. They take your belt and anything else I guess you use to hang yourself or kill somebody. So I was already pretty pissed. So when the guy took my wallet out, he put it on the desk, he took it right out of the safe in front of me, took it out of the envelope, and set the wallet down in front of me and my keys and comb. He gave it to me and I took the wallet out and counted it first. I didn't know how much I had originally, but I just wanted to piss him off a little. "Well, it's nice doing business with you guys!" and I got the hell out of there.

But then the guy sues. By the time the suit took place, I had talked to some lawyers and some insurance investigators, and I almost hired a lawyer, but then I said, wait a minute, I ain't gonna do this. As long as nothing serious happens. Jimmy Killshaw was a promoter in Baton Rouge and his lawyer filed an answer to the lawsuit and stalled things up a little bit. Then we left the territory in December 1984 and never heard another thing about it. The guy was suing the three of us, the wrestling promotion, the building, the police department, and the city of Baton Rouge. He was suing everybody. You can't sue City Hall and that's where he probably made his mistake. So we went down there in 1989 and there was somebody waiting there to serve papers on me. It was the same guy, he wanted us to be witnesses and give depositions to the lawyer because I guess he was going to use the city at this point. I had to give it to a lawyer and he took care of it. It was Jimmy Crockett's lawyer, Dennis Guthrie that took care of it. His office took care of it for nothing since it was his office that ripped us off for 40 grand. The case was dismissed before we could do anything about it. But every time I go down to that territory I'm afraid I'm going to get served.

Downtown New Orleans, Municipal Auditorium, that used to be a horrified building, but they had so much trouble down there by the time we got there, if you ever saw the old Mid-South tapes, they had like 25 feet around the ring and a police barricade. They used to have riots there. They had to take Ted DiBiase out of the building in the trunk of Grizzle Smith's car one time after he turned on Junkyard Dog. They were waiting to kill him.

Tony Zane, if you ever see his back, he's got a scar on his back. He got stabbed



TED DIBIASE (Photo by Wade Keller)

going to help Ted in a riot and they stabbed poor old Tony Zane. There were great cops there, if somebody messed up and jumped into the ring, they would drag them to the back and beat the total shit out of him. This stuff happened daily and we never got sued. And today you can't even breathe on people.

Keller: And it's probably better this way?

Cornette: Well, it's irrelevant now because nobody's getting excited enough to jump into the ring anymore. If you had optimum security like in Lake Charles and in New Orleans, we never had any problem, by the time you had the police and security measures situated, things could have been better. But at the same time business was so good. In fact, 1984 was the best year Watts ever had.

Keller: Are there any cities you haven't covered?

Cornette: Well, we did spot shows. We went to Bogalooosa, Louisiana and went to the high school football field and did \$26,000. We went to the college in Hammond, La. and did \$37,000. These were spot shows! In Lafayette, we got that thing going in an auditorium type arena where the ring was on stage, we sold out at \$16,000, raised prices and sold out at \$20,000, raised prices and sold out at \$25,000. In Ok. City, if we didn't do \$20,000 we thought the bottom fell out of the business every two weeks. Houston was doing tremendous business. Anything

under 40 to 50 thousand dollars every two weeks was just horrible. Those were our best towns. Watts always knew how to get heat on the heels and Watts was probably the best color commentator I can remember. He was just tremendous. And Dundee was the best finish guy I've ever known. Jerry Jarrett, too, and Eddie Graham, I never knew, but everybody told me his finishes were just genius.

Keller: And now you're up there.

Cornette: Well, I do well with tag teams. But, they always put heat on the heels. I'll give you an example. They never killed their babyfaces off. There's always a way to make everybody look good. When we beat II and T.A. for the Mid-South tag belts, we switched II heel. And the key was, we got the heat because we got the belts, but II got heat because he turned heel, and T.A. didn't look bad even though he got pinned and lost the belts but looked like a hero. He ended up a hero when he got tarred and feathered because of the way they presented it. Terry Taylor when Wrestling II walked out and left Magnum to take the lashes from us, Taylor stepped in and said, "I'll take the other five." Because we were going to whip Magnum ten times instead of five a piece. So Taylor took a whipping and got over. They always knew how to do something to get heat on the heels without making the babyfaces look bad. In the end, the babyfaces get over. In the end, you give them something. He wanted to go with us with the tag belts, so II and T.A. didn't get the final word. So they did the switch and everybody came out okay. With the Rock & Roll Express we got tons of heat on them, but in the end, they always beat us.

CHAPTER 12: THE LAST STAMPEDE

Keller: Let's conclude with what you said earlier in this interview is your proudest achievement in wrestling, the Last Stampede. Explain what that was all about and what the keys were to it drawing so much money.

Cornette: Okay. That came right after the II and T.A. thing. Watts, I found out later on, he thought we had tremendous heat, this will draw tremendous money, and he will have to phase the Midnight Express on out because it's going to take all the heat off of them. Well, thankfully it

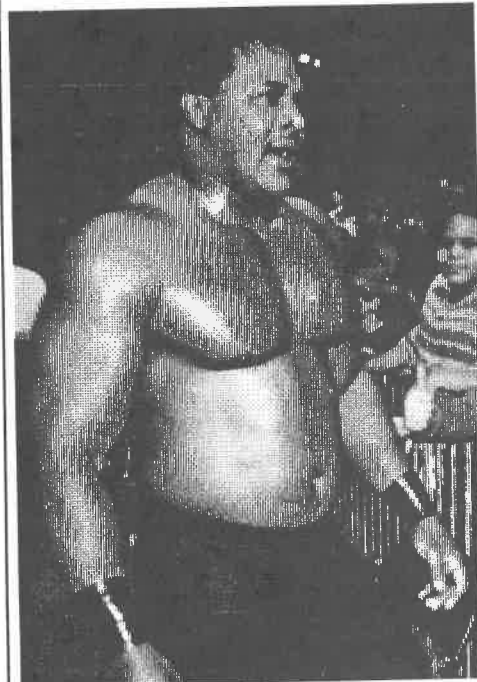
didn't turn out that way. Dundee is like, "I don't know, we'll wait and see."

Bill Watts is going to come out of retirement for the first time in two years. The deal is we were going to do the cake again. I had the celebration because we won the belts. The Rock & Roll Express, who debuted just a few weeks earlier, smashed my face into the cake. As a matter of fact, they smashed it so good, my nose started bleeding. I went all the way through to the table, but I got a nose that bleeds easily. Watts comes out at the end of the program and says, "That's the funniest thing I've ever seen in my life. We've got to show that again." Well, they show that again and I come out there ragin' with cake still in my hair, "How dare you, you sonovagun, I'm gonna sue you, sue your director, I'm gonna sue everybody in this place because this is a farce to show me with cake in my face. So Bill Watts says, "Well, I think it is funny, so if you want to sue somebody, don't sue the director, don't sue the people, don't sue Jim Ross, sue me, because I'm president of Mid-South and I told them to show it." He starts turning away from me and I grab him on the shoulder and turn him around and say, "I ain't through with you yet, Mr. Watts. I'm gonna tell you what, I'm gonna sue and by the time I'm through with you and I'm gonna have controlling interest in Mid-South sports, I'm gonna have every penny you own, and what's more, I'm gonna have your little geeky son Joel with his Adam's apple bobbing up and down, I'm gonna have him cleaning toilets and selling Midnight Express souvenirs. What do you think about that!"

He said, "Let me tell you something. Don't stick your finger in my face, don't put your hands on me, because sometimes I don't return words for words. Sometimes I return with actions, and you're not equipped to be in that caliber, so let me turn away from you right now and we're going to be okay. He starts to turn away and I grab him on the shoulder again and he wheels around and slaps the taste out of my mouth. Bingo, I go head over tea kettle. Down I go and the people are going crazy. That's the first time I've been hit, three months, they've saved it, nobody's touched me. Then off the air we go.

Jim Ross is out there the next time and said, "Before we went on the air today, a horrifying incident took place. Let's go back to where Bill Watts was pretaping

interviews with Butch Reed and Junkyard Dog about their upcoming matches." Well, he interviews Dog and he interviews Reed, and as he's interviewing Butch, I come down and start mouthing off to him from ten feet away. He says, "Will somebody get this sissy out of here." I give the daggum signal and Bobby and Stan... I mean, Bobby and Dennis come from the side door out from the parking lot into the building with a blackjack, nail Watts on the head, down he goes, we start putting the boots to him,



"HACKSAW" BUTCH REED (Photo by Wade Keller)

and we were moving some beef, too, because he wanted it to look good, and he geeked (bladed) really good. We hit him five or six times with that blackjack. Butch Reed, who's the hot single heel, realizes we've gone too far, throws his hands up and walks away. That painted that picture, right. Even Butch Reed wouldn't get involved in this. Then all of a sudden the referee and babyfaces run in and chase us away. Then there's Joel Watts cradling his bloody father's head in his lap and crying, and there's Bill Watts laid out.

So they come back and we do interviews, laughing, "Ha, ha, ha, you fat sonovabitch, walking tall. Yeah, you're walking so tall the top of your head's coming through your hair." And, they set the match and Watts comes out and does one of those interviews. You know, the one where the baseball bat's made of apple pie. He comes out and says, "Let me tell you something Jim Cornette, I'm not in shape to

get back into wrestling. But one last campaign, the last stampede, I'm coming back one time and one time only and I'm going to show you and the Midnight Express that you're not going to run over Mid-South Sports and "Cowboy" Bill Watts, and what's more—and he's holding a box—Jim Cornette says he wants Mid-South Sports. Well, if he beats me and my partner in this match, he can have controlling interest in Mid-South Sports and I'll work for him for one year. On the other hand, he's so fond of talking about his mother and his money, and all those sickening and disgusting things that little pervert pasty-faced mama's boy likes to talk about, well I've got one of his mother's dresses, a pink frilly frock. Or maybe a diaper, a nice big diaper and a big safety pin and a bottle of milk for that little baby. One way or the other, Cornette, you're going to wish you never set foot in Mid-South Wrestling." So at the SuperDome it was a diaper and at the other places it was a diaper.

Now came the search for his partner. If you recall, Junkyard Dog lost a loser leaves town match to Mr. Wrestling II. But about a year and half previous to that he lost a loser leaves town match to DiBiase and came back as Stagger Lee. So Bill Watts filmed a video of where he goes out to North Carolina where he searches for his partner, looking for Stagger Lee. Dog's been gone six or eight weeks now. So he finds Stagger and announces that's his partner. So the match is set, Bill Watts & Stagger Lee vs. The Midnight Express where Jim Cornette either wears a dress or owns Mid-South Sports. Billed "The Last Stampede," they had the t-shirts printed up, the whole goddamn bit. They did this right.

Every city, every city in that territory except for New Orleans, we have the box office record for wrestling. And New Orleans, we missed it by \$7,000. We did \$176,000 and the record was \$183,000. Houston did a \$102,000 at the Sam Houston Coliseum. They were lined up three and four abreast all the way around the building and they couldn't come in. For the scaffold match between Rock & Roll Express and us, we did \$89,900 and that was a sell-out with the fire marshall there. We did \$102,000 without him. And Beaumont did \$30,000 at a time when it was doing \$15,000. OK' City sold-out with \$100,000. Tulsa sold out. Jackson, Mississippi sold out with \$63,000. The last



JIM CORNETTE & THE MIDNIGHT EXPRESS (Photo by Wade Keller)

time they had that many people in the building, it was so long ago they did \$18,000 because the tickets were a dollar and two dollars. Little Rock, Arkansas did \$71,000. They locked the front gates of the fairgrounds at 7:00 a half hour before the matches began. We drew 3000 more than Kenny Rogers drew. Greenwood, Mississippi sold out, did \$20,000 in a small building. Alexandria, the only sellout in the history of that building for wrestling, something like \$50,000. Shreveport, Memorial Auditorium, sold out. Monroe we did about 35 grand. Baton Rouge did \$52,000 where they had already been in the SuperDome.

Keller: This is more than the gross national product for that year.

Cornette: Just about. Everywhere it was tremendous. It was a tremendous run. This was in the days when we were making payoffs instead of contract money. For 14

dates, the angle drew \$1.2 million dollars and we made that month they were running like \$15,000. I had never seen anything like this. I didn't know that was possible. My first week in Bobby and Dennis told me we were going to make \$1000 that week. That to me was incredible, especially just preliminary matches just coming in. And sure enough, we made \$1000. The thing with Watts, we never did that kind of business again, but business was still good, but right after that was our angle with the Rock & Roll Express and ran the whole summer with them. That's when we cleaned up with spot shows, too.

Keller: Hopefully Smoky Mountain Wrestling will make "The Last Stampede" look bush league. Thanks for all of your time and memories.

Cornette: I had a good time going through them.

PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY

A First-Person Introspective on a Young, Ambitious Career

By Wade Keller, Editor/Publisher

CHAPTER 1 THEORIES ON MANAGING

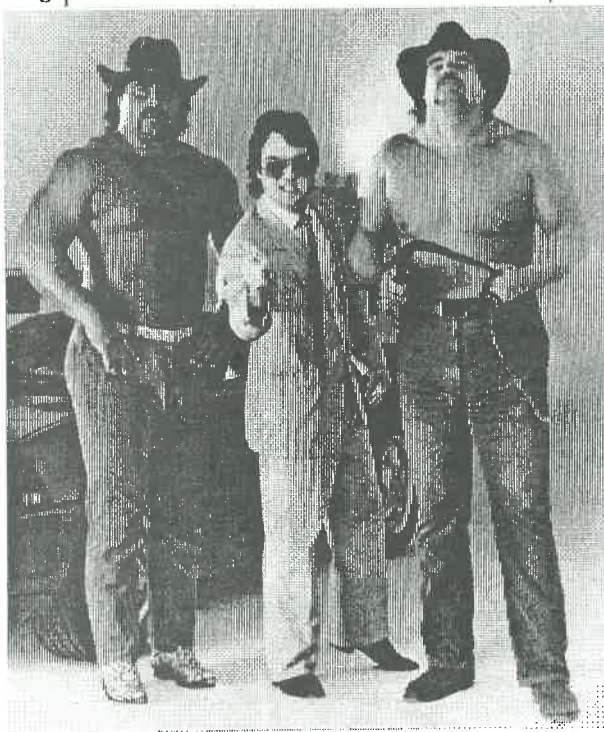
Wade Keller: Define what you believe a pro wrestling manager is.

Paul E. Dangerously: A pro wrestling manager, to me, is but one of many variables in the equation that makes a night at the wrestling matches or a wrestling television program. In the event that a manager manages more than one athlete such as I do with the Dangerous Alliance, you become the constant in the equation in that any time they see you, they know that this presentation is representative not only of the commodity that you are showing, but also of every one else within your particular equation. For example, when people see me on TV or live in the arena walk out with Bobby Eaton, they hopefully should think of Arn Anderson and "Stunning" Steve Austin and "Ravishing" Rick Rude and Madusa as well because we are a representation of an organization. There are some managers, and I have been in that position before, who manage only one particular wrestler or team. The way I have always looked at the position of being a manager is you are not a second banana like Ed McMahon was to a Johnny Carson, but neither are you the host of the show and "Paul E. Dangerously presents this athlete who works and wrestles for Paul E. Dangerously"... I define a wrestling manager's role as being one-half of a wrestler or one-third of a two-man tag team, like a third hand to a boxer. You are

an integral part of the presentation.

Keller: Can a manager steal attention away from a wrestler as opposed to adding?

Dangerously: Definitely. The athlete is there in the ring being bounced around like a ping-pong ball enduring pain and



PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY AND HIS FIRST TEAM, THE MOTOR CITY MADMEN IN JAN. '87 (Photo by David Hammond)

punishment and here a manager is on the outside of the ring, closer to the people, not being touched. Therefore, the people are not getting satisfaction out of seeing you pay for the evil deeds you have committed, so therefore naturally a manager is going to have more hatred directed toward him by the people than the athlete in the ring. If I

decide to turn my back to the ring and begin to berate the people, their attention goes to me and not the wrestler in the ring. It is way too simple for someone to attempt to distract the people from the product. To me it's a very big responsibility for me to go out there with any of these tremendous personalities. You have to be one-half or one-third of the presentation, and that means sometimes not being noticed for 90 percent of your time out there. To be effective as a manager, it can not be "Paul E. Dangerously presents Arn Anderson." It has to be, "There goes Arn Anderson and Paul E. Dangerously together as a unit." A manager that steals the entire spotlight had better be doing it for a reason and that had better be the gameplan or you very quickly will find yourself out of work.

Keller: Have you ever been guilty of that?

Dangerously: Sure. No doubt about it. It takes a very long time to learn how to act and react.

Keller: You're still finding that mix?

Dangerously: Sure, and hopefully I will continue to find that mix within the confines and the great freedom that is given to Paul E. Dangerously. You can never stop learning in any profession you are in. When you want to be the best at what you do, when you have achieved everything, what is there left for you to do? Alexander the Great sat on a rock and cried because there was no more of the world as it was known then for him to conquer. What do you do then, lose some of it back and then regain it?

Look what they did to Mike Tyson because the guy was absolutely the perfect boxing machine. They destroyed him because there was very little left for him to conquer. There are very few people who have the luxury of not having to improve.

Keller: Does a manager have a purpose if the fans do not notice him at ringside, such as J.J. Dillon or Gary Hart? The fans know they are there, but the manager does not do anything to attract fans' attention.

Dangerously: In that particular equation, the variable was to be less than noticed during 10 percent, 20 percent, or even 5 percent of the match. When Ric Flair was with J.J. Dillon, the presentation of

Flair was not where Flair would utilize the interference aspect that J.J. was capable of. J.J. was there in the capacity of watching his investment, as was Gary Hart for his men. There were times when J.J. would be involved only to save the title. When I say only, I mean he didn't say a word during the match, he didn't turn to the fans, he never shouted instructions, he never said "change the gameplan," he never displayed emotion because he was simply there as an observer, much like Arnold Skoaland was for Bruno Sammartino and Bob Backlund.

If you're not doing anything, then that's exactly what that presentation is going to be about. If you're not doing anything because you're lazy or not willing to do anything, you're not going to be employed very long unless it is for a reason, unless you are kissing somebody's ass, or you've got a picture of a guy with a 15 year old dead goat who also used to have an affair with the promoters bi-sexual illegitimate son.

Keller: *You're not speaking about anyone in particular, are you?*

Dangerously: I'm really not, unfortunately. There are many people I wish I could point to and say. "Yes, I'm talking about him," but that wouldn't be the truth. Well, maybe in one case. But anyway, the thing is, to me, when you work with a particular person, you have to understand their needs and what they want out of their match. I certainly do different things during a "Stunning" Steve Austin match than I do during an Arn Anderson match and different things for singles versus tag team matches. To me, one of the major things that must be learned is what you are doing there in that particular match. There are some managers who have very little to do because that is what is called for. Bobby Davis was the prototype for Paul E. Dangerously, Jim Cornette, and to an extent Bobby Heenan because he was a wrestler for only a short time. Bobby Davis, according to what people have told me—he retired before I was born—and according to what Buddy Rogers had explained to me, Bobby Davis did very, very little. But Bobby Davis and Buddy Rogers were identified together. You never saw Buddy Rogers without Bobby Davis. It wasn't a complete picture. Later on it was Bobby Heenan and Nick Bockwinkel and Bobby Heenan redefined the role for a professional wrestling manager.

A manager that does nothing, if it's called for, is doing his job. If he's lazy or doesn't want to do anything, I don't think in this day that will last very long with a very few exceptions for different reasons. But that was a lot more prevalent in the past than it is today. It's a hard job to keep.

Keller: *Have you learned more about being a pro wrestling manager, (a) by being at ringside or (b) by learning from talking to and observing others?*

Dangerously: Oh, absolutely "b". B, b, b, b, b, b, b.

Keller: *What is the most common misperception you run into by non-managers about managers?*

Dangerously: That managers don't draw money.

Keller: *Okay, refute that misperception.*

Dangerously: I grew up in New York watching Lou Albano, Freddie Blassie, and the Grand Wizard present different challengers to Bruno Sammartino. If Lou Albano came out on television and said, "Next month at Madison Square Garden, I'm going to have a guy go in against Bruno Sammartino and stomp Sammartino's butt all over New York City and you've never seen this guy before, well, Albano had enough brutal wrestlers associated with himself in the past that you knew he wasn't bringing in Frankie Williams or Randy Mulky or Mr. X. He was bringing in somebody who was going to give Sammartino a fight. As I said, the manager is a constant in the equation. Jerry Lawler sold out the Mid-South Coliseum, they say, because he turned down all of these many challengers. What everybody fails to acknowledge is that it was Jimmy Hart who presented those challengers. Hart at times was better known than those challengers, but because Jimmy Hart had "enough faith" to have this man represent him in the ring against Jerry Lawler, the people knew this guy just may be the one to knock the king off his throne. When Jim Cornette ever got stuck in a six-man tag team match back in 1986, it drew big money because the people wanted to see him get his ass kicked. Gary Hart, who you referred to as not doing as much as many other managers, got his head shaved by Fritz Von Erich at Texas Stadium and it drew big money.

A manager draws money. Damn right.

I think anybody who is an integral part of the presentation draws money. Hey, I think Doc Severenson was worth \$3 million a year. Not because he *was* the Tonight Show, but because he was one of the many variables that made the Tonight Show starring Johnny Carson an entertaining show to watch. The same goes for Ed McMahon, who was part of what was a successful presentation. If you are an integral part of a successful presentation, then you are part of the product which people are paying to see.

Keller: *Are there other misconceptions, maybe about you personally?*

Dangerously: Oh, there are so many misconceptions about me that my parents sometimes scratch their heads and go, "Are you sure you're our son." The biggest misconception about me is that I wanted to be "Paul E. Dangerously Presents." I don't think people think that about me as much as before. I think in the past they did. In looking at old videotapes, I can see where people could come to that conclusion. I have never walked out of a dressing room and said, "Screw this guy, they're watching me." If they're supposed to watch me for a particular reason, then the person I'm walking out there with knows it. There's no undermining when it comes to anybody I'm working with. We all go out there with one goal in mind, we are going to do our jobs.

Keller: *Give me the second-most common misperception about managers in general and then about you personally.*

Dangerously: I don't know. If you would tell me what you believe is a misconception, I could defend it.

Keller: *There is nothing else that stands out in your mind?*

Dangerously: That one stands out so bad it blocks out everything else that we as a stereotypical group are accused of or misperceived as. That one has always stuck in my craw, not only from a negotiating standpoint or ego standpoint, but because in my particular case and Jim Cornette, Jimmy Hart, and Bobby Heenan and anybody who has been an integral part of a presentation, I know it's not true. It just stands out to me.

Keller: *Do you ever sense jealousy or resentment by wrestlers because you make darn*

good money but do not take bumps or risk injury to the degree wrestlers do?

Dangerously: Sure. And I think they are 100 percent right to feel that way. I go out to the ring with a wrestler and these guys are getting slammed and punched and thrown around, hit with chairs, slammed into tables. They have families to feed. What must go through a human being's mind when he's up there sailing over the top rope, thinking about junior who needs braces. Then, when you land and realize you're not cripples and you can support your family, just that moment, to go through that moment 100 times in a match, meanwhile I'm out there going, "Ouch! I bet that hurt, Arn! I bet that Steinerline really jarred your vertebrae and your teeth. By the way, I feel fine. I just broke a sweat because I'm screaming so hard."

Keller: So is laryngitis your biggest risk?

Dangerously: No, I'm still the first one to get stabbed. But as for the fact that in general a manager does not take even an iota or a billionth of the physical punishment the wrestler takes in the ring, I believe there is a lot of envy and I don't blame them.

Keller: Do you work to overcome that envy or resentment just so there is a better synergism between you and the wrestlers?

Dangerously: One of the reasons why I am drenched in sweat any time I work, one of the reasons I don't go out there and sit in the chair and read the magazine while the guy in the ring is busting his ass, because in my own way with my limited physical abilities, I work as hard as I can. That doesn't mean I'm working as hard or harder than anybody else can. I take myself to the limits I can get to and try to push beyond. The greatest compliment anybody can pay me is that I give anything and everything I can do to make it a better presentation on behalf of myself and the wrestlers. I remember one night when I was managing "Hot Stuff" Eddie Gilbert, he wrestled I think a 45 minute match with Shane Douglas. I was so wrenched, you could wring my shirt out and easily fill one of those Big Gulp cups from 7-Eleven. Eddie turned to me and said, "You really did your job tonight." I turn and look at him and he's bleeding from head to toe, his elbow was puffed out from an infection, his shoulder was turning purple which was

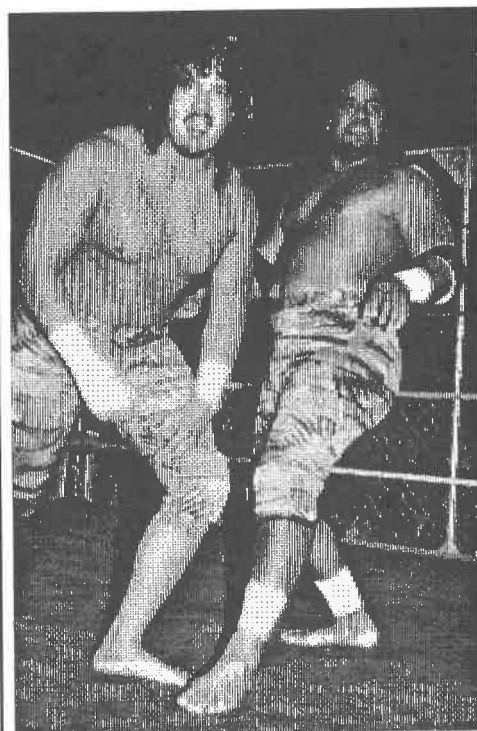
part of a shoulder injury which eventually led to almost ending his career, the vertebrae in the back of his neck swelled up to three times it's normal size which dates back to his car wreck, one of his eye's had been blackened, he had a bloody nose. He looked like he had been run over by a Mack semi. But he still found the energy to pat me on the back. Then he hobbled away, looking like a premature Terry Funk. Then he stood in the shower for 20 minutes and on the ride home he had more ice packs on him than Frosty the Snowman. It kind of dawned on me that as long as I'm busting my ass and I don't slack off, then I'm part of the presentation. It would be the same as Johnny Carson turning to Ed McMahon and saying, "Gee, how come he doesn't tell more jokes tonight." You do everything that you can possibly do to make it a better presentation, be it speaking up or shutting up, depending on who you're with.

Keller: How often do you learn something amazing or incredible about being a manager?

Dangerously: Every night that I have worked with certain individuals. It doesn't have to be big, but to me it is the smaller things, it's the things that other people would never even think of or notice, but it's those little things that make the different between decent and good, good and real good, real good and unbelievable, and unbelievable and the best there is. It's little subtle things. I learned so many different things from Austin Idol, Eddie Gilbert, Dennis Condrey. You go out there and listen to Rick Rude who has a totally different perspective on things and you go, "Oh my god, I never thought of that. I never knew it could be viewed that way. I never knew it could be done that way." Then Arn Anderson mentions something else. It's an awakening. These people that I have been—I don't want to say fortunate—blessed to work with. You think about this and each one of these masters have a different approach and a different perspective that when you listen to their approach, it's an awakening.

Keller: Have you ever worked with wrestlers who are totally disinterested in not only you, but themselves, and they are only interested in going through the motions and collecting their paychecks?

Dangerously: One of the reasons why I have found sanctuary from super-harsh criticism of a presentation where people



SAMOAN SWAT TEAM (Photo by Wade Keller)

said, "He didn't give a damn," is because everyone who I have been fortunate enough to work with cares about what goes on out there. Because I was lucky enough to establish a name for myself quick, fast, and early, I was never stuck with anybody that I just sat there and said, "I can't stand this sonofabitch." One of the presentations that had absolutely no chemistry together and was totally wrong for all parties involved was when I was managing the Samoan Swat Team, who in my mind are one of the most awe-inspiring tag teams in this industry who deserve to be in main events and make a lot of money because they can make any promoter a lot of money. They are tremendous talents. The unfortunate part is we never knew how to help each other. But nobody ever sat there and said, "These guys don't give a damn." Every night we truly tried to gel and find the right mix so they could utilize me for what I do and I could help them do what they do.

Keller: Was there a way to gel and you or they did not work hard enough or were not open-minded enough?

Dangerously: No, I don't think so. Some things just aren't meant to be. David Letterman was never meant to be Johnny Carson's sidekick, but they were both the best at what they did. Everybody has to be with the right person in order to make it the

correct presentation. Sending two pieces of talent out there just because they are tremendously talented people is not right. I don't know if Eddie Van Halen and Eric Clapton could do an effective duet, but I would like to listen to either one of them individually. They might be the two greatest guitar players I can think of right now, but they aren't the right two dudes to work together... I still keep in contact with the Samoans. I have known Samu since he started back in 1982 or 1983 in the WWF and have been in contact with him ever since. It wasn't personal, we just did not gel.

Keller: From whom have you learned the most about being a wrestling manager?

Dangerously: Everyone. You can't learn D-E-F before you learn A-B-C. D-E-F is probably more important than A-B-C, but then again isn't A-B-C necessary before reaching D-E-F? I would have never understood even the concept of the manager without having watched Bobby Heenan. But then again, I would never have understood the fact that I'm representing a unit without having worked with Austin Idol and Tommy Rich. It's like first grade, second grade, third grade, and so on. It would be unfair for me to even list ten people who were my greatest teachers. I've learned some things from people just by watching them on television and saying, "Wow, that's a revelation." I learned things from the Samoans without being able to work with them that have been imperative.

Keller: What is one specific thing that was a major thing you learned this year?

Dangerously: This is going to sound like I'm kissing ass, but it is how much fun this job can be. Even under the worst circumstances. Even when I get thrown around, smacked around, bounced around, and hurt, how much fun it is to work with Rick Rude, Steve Austin, Bobby Eaton, or Arn Anderson. I really learned how much fun this job can be.

CHAPTER 2

EVALUATING THE TALK SHOWS

Keller: What does Paul E. Dangerously think of the current talk show wars?

Dangerously: I was born in 1965, so I grew up as part of the television

generation. I've been watching Johnny Carson since I was 5 years old. People of my generation have run to their therapist because Johnny Carson finally quit. I'm real glad that the talk show situation happened this year because it proves to be that in this and any other form or sport or entertainment, you can be good, great, or



DENNIS MILLER AND PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY
(Photo by Dominick Conde, 1991)

the best at what you do and get your ass kicked. I say that because to me the most innovative, up-to-date, the guy who I would have picked—Dennis Miller—had his show cancelled. I found him hysterical. I dug his humor. I loved his references. I thought he had his finger on the pulse of a certain generation. He redefined the talk show format. He did for talk shows in 1992 what David Letterman did in 1982.

Keller: What are some of those things?

Dangerously: Just his approach to it. His demand for honesty out of his guests. Whether they were joking around or being serious, he demanded honesty from them. He would not be shot down on an insult fight. He didn't back off. People who were full of crap were treated like they were full of crap and told that to their faces. I found him to understand that he was a part of showbusiness. Just because your ratings aren't high doesn't mean you're not talented. They're just not promoting you right or you're not in the right timeslot or you're not on the right stations. I enjoy watching Letterman now more than ever before. It looks to be like he's getting ready

to tell off NBC and jump. I think he has really come into his own. He became stale and stagnated. He lost his desire to be the creative genius that he is. It just got stale for a while. All of a sudden he is knocking them dead again. He is probably doing his finest work ever. I am a reborn Letterman fan. In the same aspect, I can point to one of my favorite personalities, Dennis Miller, and say to myself, "Just because they cancel you or just because you lose your job or just because you don't have a place today. It just means one of the many variables that go into that equation went wrong. He got his ass kicked and I think he was the best."

Keller: How about Leno vs. Arsenio?

Dangerously: I like how hard Arsenio works. I really admire how hard he works. He really goes out there. He must have incredible market researchers because he tries to keep his finger on the pulse. He wants to be not only hip, but set the trend for what will be hip. He has worked very hard to get where he is. Leno has the natural resentment because he was anointed the new "King of Late Night." What comes with that inherently is a lot of resentment. Leno is a very talented person who has told some of the funniest jokes that I've ever heard, but he doesn't particularly appeal to me all that much. I don't think he's as good as Arsenio and I feel in my heart he didn't hold a candle to Dennis Miller.

CHAPTER 3

THEORIES ON MANAGING

Keller: When did you first want to become a wrestling manager and did that come before or after you realized you had a chance to be a very good one?

Dangerously: I first wanted to become a wrestling manager six months after I became one. I lost my job in Memphis and said, "God, I don't want to stop doing this."

Keller: Explain how you originally became a manager?

Dangerously: Besides being a photographer since I was 13 and doing the Grand Wizard and Lou Albano and Freddie Blassie's fan clubs... What a karma that was. You run the fan club for the three managers in the WWF and then you become a manager. I bet Freud would have a field day with that one. Or Dr. Ruth,



A YOUTHFUL PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY WITH FREDDIE BLASSIE, LOU ALBANO, AND THE GRAND WIZARD
(Photo courtesy Heyman Collection)

depending on how you wanted to approach what was going on.

I became a manager because starting in 1985, right before I turned 20, I started doing play-by-play announcing for several of the Northeast Promotions, Bob Raskin's NICW, the Can-Am Wrestling Alliance run by A.W. Constantini out of West Haven, Connecticut—there were dozens of independent promotions in the Northeast doing cable TV shows and some had a small amount of syndication going on. Because I was with the magazines and was publicizing these people and because there weren't a lot of people who understood wrestling to the point where they could explain it on television, I was new and a fresh face with kind of a unique approach to things. I was afforded the chance to be a play-by-play announcer on a lot of these shows. A lot of people involved started bugging me, telling me to have a career in front of the camera. I really didn't foresee that for my life. Yeah, I had thought about it and yeah, I always said, "Gee, wouldn't it be great to be able to do it." But I kept saying to myself, "There are a million people who want that job. You're just one in a million. Even though you have all these contacts and friends in the business, you're just one of the million men that want to be where they are. I had been teased about it by Blassie and Albano and I said if the opportunity ever came along, I'd do it, but never really thought that the opportunity was going to come along. Then I got nagged and prodded about it to the point where in the Summer of '86, Bam Bam Bigelow, who was going to be my very first protégé, dared me to do it and called me

chickenshit that I wouldn't take the time-out to do it. He pointed to the fact that when I became a photographer, I told everybody that I was going to become the editor of all of these magazines and they said, "Yeah, you're a pimple-faced teenager with buck teeth and you'll be lucky to write a story for one of us." Next thing you know, I'm editing three magazines. I go to Studio 54 and I became the head photographer. I said, "Gee, I'd really like to run the public relations in this place." Everybody said, "Yeah, right, like you're really qualified." Next thing you know, it worked. Just through hard work and dedication, I made a lot of my dreams come true. So Bigelow said, "If this is a dream of yours, then why not have the balls to do it." I took him up on it. Thank God it worked. Wow, it really did work.

Keller: Does he receive royalty checks from you?

Dangerously: Boy, it's funny, Bigelow once busted my chops that he wanted a royalty check. Then I reminded him that I gave him his first match because when I was head of public relations at Studio 54, we always used to produce shows there and parties. On Aug. 23, 1985, we did "WrestleParty '85" at Studio 54 and I gave Ric Flair the "Wrestling Press International Man of the Year" award. It was in the *USA Today*, *New York Times*, *Daily News*, and the *New York Post* and it made every paper. It got the NWA and Crockett Promotions and Ric Flair national exposure in a time when Hulk Hogan and Vince McMahon were dominating the media. As a special attraction on that show, we had a wrestling

ring set up in the middle of the dance floor at Studio 54 and Bam Bam Bigelow wrestled his first match against four opponents who he easily defeated.

Keller: What skills did you have as a kid that helped make you a great manager?

Dangerously: It was real tough for somebody to beat me in an insult fight and I had really large phone bills during my teenage years, so I was very prepared to be Paul E. Dangerously when I was a teenager.

Keller: Who did you first manage?

Dangerously: My first team was the Motor City Madmen, two guys out of Larry Sharpe's school. They were big. One was Mike Moore who came to WCW back in 1990. At the time he was 6-6 and 340, just a monster. The other guy was Big Mark Dumar who was a powerlifter out of Baltimore and went with me to Florida, which was my first territory, and was known as Tombstone for the six weeks we were there in February and March 1987 and he was 6-3 and 330 and built well.

Keller: How did your role as a wrestling manager change from what it is today? Did you even have a clue back then?

Dangerously: No. I don't know if I have a clue yet, really?

Keller: I'm sure that quote will be brought up to the arbitrator during your next contract negotiations.

Dangerously: I'm sure even if I didn't say that they will bring up a lot of stuff I did or didn't say. It was a different business back then and there were different perspectives on how to approach that part of the presentation. It's a much different industry today. What wrestling was in 1987 has no relevance to what it is in 1992. I've seen the business change since I joined the Turner Organization on November 1, 1988. It's a totally different business.

Keller: How has it changed for a manager in a major league, national company?

Dangerously: There have been so many that the uniqueness was gone. I don't even consider myself a manager anymore. I'm not announced as a manager, I'm announced as the Chief Executive Officer, the CEO of the Dangerous Alliance. I'm trying to disassociate myself with the stereotypical role of "professional wrestling manager." Anybody who wants

to be truly successful, truly innovative, the best at what they do, has to redefine the role. Certainly after watching the managers like Wild Red Berry and Bobby Davis, Bobby Heenan did not sit there and say, "I want to do exactly what they do." No, he took the role and refined it. Just like Sammartino defined what a champion was, Hulk Hogan redefined it. Just like Lou Thesz defined what a champion was, Ric Flair redefined it, and Sting redefined it to an extent. Jim Cornette didn't grow up saying I've seen Bobby Heenan, I've seen Jimmy Hart, I want to do exactly what they do. He wanted to approach it in a way nobody else has approached it. The business as it was in '87 and '88 is so different than it is today, that you have to come up and continue to come up with new ways to approach your position, otherwise you become behind the times. You always have to be ahead of yourself. I kind of look at it like this. You're running up a down escalator. If you run up it fast enough, you get to the top. If you stand still, you're gonna go down.

CHAPTER 4

MEMPHIS BOUND

Keller: How did you get your job in Memphis?

Dangerously: I was in Florida and Jim Crockett Promotions bought the territory and I knew I was out of a job and Tombstone had to go back home for a while. In the meantime they had found a giant of a man who could hit a softball clear out of the park from West Memphis, Arkansas. This guy didn't want to effect his future endeavors in the business by exposing himself as a big muscle-headed clod. He was discovered by a bunch of guys on Jerry Lawler's softball team. Lawler, Jerry Calhoun, Eddie Marlin, and Jerry Jarrett saw that this guy was consistently hitting the balls out of the park. He was 6-6, 6-7 and back then wasn't really defined, but was a massive 330 pound dude. He said, "Yeah, I'll be a wrestler, but I think I would be a bigger star in the future than my first few years, so I don't want to affect the public's perception of me down the road as I progress from a rookie. So the guy opted to wear a mask and wrestle as Lord Humongous. They needed someone to speak for this guy and represent this guy, so Bigelow, who was there at the time, recommended me to the promotion as a

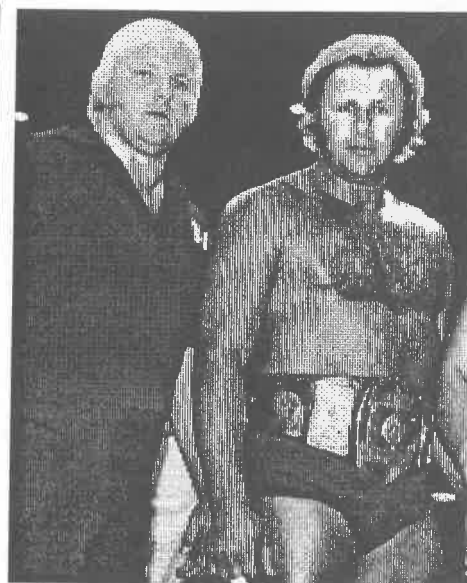
guy who could do it and called me one night after I had done a show in Sarasota. He said, "Hey, if you call the promotion, they'll let you come in and manage this guy." When my run in Florida was over, because there was not a place for me after Crockett took over, I started six days later in Memphis as manager of Lord Humongous who became later on better known as Sid Justice and Sid Vicious. This was his second or third match and boy, he was right to wear the mask. He really was a very inexperienced rookie who needed to learn a lot of things. I went out there and was told, "You got two or three minutes on the mic, do whatever you want." I just did things that being from New York was not shocking to me, but pretty much shocked everybody in Memphis.

Keller: What shocked them?

Dangerously: I said that being from New York I keep up to date with everything that goes on in the country. There are newstands in Times Square where you can buy every major city's newspaper on a Sunday. I've kept up to date on Memphis for many, many years and I had said that if Jerry Lawler was the big man in Memphis, no wonder there's so many lesbians in and around Memphis, Tennessee. In New York that would be considered a pretty funny line and kind of an honest evaluation. But in Memphis it was somewhat equivalent of Howard Stern going on TV and telling the FCC to kiss his ass. I really didn't find it too shocking, and when I came back at the WMC studios from saying that, just about everybody who had any say in the promotion was picking their jaw off the ground going, "You have got to be out of your mind." I did it in a way where when I walked out of the studio that day, the people remembered Lord Humongous and Paul E. Dangerously. The next thing I know, Austin Idol and Tommy Rich—I knew both from when I was a photographer, Austin better than Rich—said we want this kid to be our manager. My second 24 hours in the promotion and I was part of what was to become the most legendary feud in Memphis in a long, long time, Lawler vs. Idol & Rich. Which was a big, big thing in 1987.

Keller: Would that have been nearly as big without you?

Dangerously: Oh, it was big before I got there. I got into Memphis on March 21, 1987 and Idol & Rich had already ran



BOBBY HEENAN AND NICK BOCKWINKEL
(Photo by Mike Lano)

Lawler's groin into the ringpost and he had already come back from the injury. They were doing huge business at the time. Especially by today's standards, but even by the standards of the mid-1980's. The business started to taper off because the people had seen Idol and Rich get their asses kicked by Lawler and various partners he brought in, be it Bigelow or Bockwinkel. The people's thirst for revenge had been quenched. All of a sudden a new variable had entered into the equation. Now there's a third party to this gang, to this dangerous alliance. All of a sudden there is somebody there who hasn't been kicked who is stirring a new pop full of poison. Would it have been legendary? Sure it would have been legendary. What people most remember about me during that legendary feud, it was that it was my first big deal. When you look back on things, hey, I remember when Blackjack Mulligan put the claw on Andre the Giant and they "x'ed" it out on TV or I remember when Larry Zbyszko smacked Bruno Sammartino in the head with a chair. I remember when Anderson darn near killed Dusty in a rage. What people probably say about my role in that legendary feud is that it was the first time we ever got a look at Paul E. Dangerously. That's really the most legendary thing I did in there, I started.

Keller: How long did it take before people weren't treating you like you were just another manager who would be here today and gone tomorrow, both by the promoters and the wrestlers?

Dangerously: I was a real head-strong asshole when I was 21 years old and refused to be treated that way. If I had started in the business today rather than then, I would not have made it. No one would have tolerated what I was saying to some of these people. I was 21 years old, I grew up in New York, even though I grew up in a sheltered suburb I spent as much time as I could in the city and had been part of a successful business in New York City and had no qualms in telling somebody to go screw themselves. They'd be taken aback. They'd say, "Who the hell are you to talk to me that way?" And who the hell was I? But I had such chutzpah to say this to these people so they said, "This guy must have something because he wouldn't be talking to us that way if he couldn't back it up."

Keller: *Would you recommend that style to other people trying to be successful or only if they've got what it takes to back such an attitude?*

Dangerously: You know, every time I did that, every time someone with a lot more experience pulled me aside, they said, "You can't do this." But, gee, at the time back then it seemed to work for me. I'd say to anybody who wants advice, do what's best for yourself. It ended up backfiring on me after a while, but it sure got me through some rough stages, but that was just being in the right place at the right time. I picked my spots to do it. Who knows, maybe one day the promoter got out of bed and his wife was in a bad mood and he dropped two eggs in the kitchen in the morning and the dog ate it and threw up and a kid tripped on it and hurt his hip, so he had to take a kid to the doctor and when he got home his wife bitched at him and on his way to the arena he got a speeding ticket and upon arriving he asked me how I was doing and I said, "Really terrible, let me tell you why." And he responded, "Screw you, go back to Scarsdale." I was lucky that on the days I showed that side of my personality, they had the patience to listen to me or I had the leverage to do it. It all depends on where you are and what is happening around the world at the time.

Keller: *Can you pinpoint a main thing that occurred in Memphis that taught you something incredible?*

Dangerously: I really cut my teeth in Memphis, being exposed to Austin Idol

and Tommy Rich. Being part of that situation with people trying to kill you. I mean, I had death threats in Memphis. One of the most educational experiences I had was my second week there, I had a live interview at the WMC studio. I also brought a tape from Austin Idol and myself taped earlier in the week directed at Jerry Lawler. After I showed the interview, I did a live interview to expand on what we said. The people weren't too happy about my opinion of Tennessee at the time. After the broadcast, I stopped at Danver's, which is a hamburger chain in that part of the country. There were no Danver's in New York and I had never been to Danver's. Pat Tanaka was driving me crazy, telling me they had the best hamburgers in the world. I kept thinking that Fudrucker's was the best. I stopped off at Danver's and I went inside, which I never do anymore, and I ordered a Danver's hamburger. This little girl who must've been four or five years old with this little angelic face and little blond hair and pigtails, she goes, "Excuse me, aren't you Paul E. Dangerously." I said, "Yes I am." She said, "Could I have our autograph." As I turned to reach for a pen I thought she had, she didn't have a pen in her hand which forced me to have eye contact with her and when I made eye contact, she spit in my face." She said, "I hope Jerry Lawler kills you, you sonovabitch," and she ran out. I realized there that people are really taking to heart what I'm saying. Now I don't eat at fast-food places anymore or restaurants where you have insulted the hometown of the people who are preparing your food.

But I really cut my teeth in Memphis. That's when I really learned what the job was in Memphis. I really didn't have a clue what it was about in the independents or in Florida, but when I got to Memphis I learned, and was forced to learn and was glad to learn. That's why when I lost my job there, I was eager to continue in this vocational endeavor.

Keller: *How were you treated by Lawler & Jarrett?*

Dangerously: That promotion gave me a tremendous opportunity and it is something I have not forgotten. It is something I have had to remind myself of several times when I see things that particular individuals in that promotion have said or done that have shown them to be either ignorant or just assholes. Jerry

Jarrett gave me a check my first week in there that I didn't like. I presented my case to him why I deserved more money, and to his credit, he said, "You presented your case, I agree with you," and he gave me more money. There were weeks when I didn't like my pay but he didn't agree I deserved more and was man enough to tell me to my face, "No, you don't deserve more money and that's all I'm going to give you," and I had to accept it because my other option was I had to make a grandstand and quit over it.

I never had a problem with Jerry Jarrett personally. He probably didn't like me and quite frankly in retrospect, I can't blame him. I was a 21 year old kid from New York who back then talked with a New York accent telling him, "Listen, you hillbilly, I'm from New York and you're from Hendersonville, Tennessee and I'm going to turn your hick promotion upside down.." I was cocky enough to believe what I was saying and I'm sure he didn't appreciate it, but I was part of a presentation or a unit that was doing big business for him, so he really had to swallow it. He always took the time to sit down and tell me, "Don't ever let anybody get you down when things get down because you have a bright future in this business and you will be a valuable asset in this industry in the years to come." He took the time and the effort to tell me that along with other things like, "Why don't you shut your mouth," or "Boy, if I was your parents, I'd wash your mouth with soap." I mean, I had my problems with them over payoffs and I certainly didn't like the fact that when I blew my knee out when I fell off the scaffold, they weren't willing to help me in any way whether it be with medical expenses or even promise of employment once I did get hurt. Other individuals in that promotion treated me the way the old-timers present promoters to be. They used me for everything I was worth, and when they were done with me, they spit me out and have never given me the credit—and it is very little credit—but what little credit I deserve for being part of a history-making feud and have the gumption to say on the record that Paul E. Dangerously serves no purpose within the industry. I feel that anybody who feels that way is entitled to their opinion, but considering the circumstances and what we were involved with and the ideas of mine that were implemented during that time

and during that feud that made everybody a lot of money, for someone to say that is not only insulting to me, but shows me that they're a bitter person who needs to get their shit together more than I do—and I need to get my shit together, but someone who would say that after being part of that feud, and knowing how much input I had in it, needs to get their shit together more than I do—and I need to get my shit together pretty bad.



JERRY LAWLER (Photo by Mike Lano)

Keller: To what do you attribute his (Jerry Lawler's) attitude or statement?

Dangerously: I don't think it's jealousy and don't know if it's bitterness. I attribute it to being an insensitive, ungrateful asshole, a man who never appreciated what made that promotion such a success. I've heard many people tell me, and I've heard it more than once from different sources, the quote: "Boy, Jimmy Hart was a backstabber to leave here." To be honest with you, seeing how they treated—and I'm just talking about certain people who are ungrateful to your contribution—after seeing how certain people treat you who had say-so and had power, I don't think Jimmy Hart backstabbed somebody for jumping—and I wasn't there, so I'm speaking out of assumption and hearsay—but Jimmy Hart at the first opportunity he got because I don't think anybody appreciated exactly how much he meant there and how much he contributed and how much he did for the promotion and the

company. I don't blame him for going. It's just being ungrateful to those who contribute to a successful presentation.

Keller: To what degree did you have influence in your role in the USWA.

Dangerously: Austin Idol and Tommy Rich were veterans who never truly liked each other but knew they had the right mix that made them a great tag team and an awesome presentation to the public. Tommy Rich showed me more respect and offered more sincere friendship than anybody that I had met up until that time. As much as Idol took me under his wing in business, Tommy took me under his wing as a friend. He treated me like a little brother and being that Tommy Rich was such a phenomenal success at such an early age, he remembered that young guys have new ideas that should be tested and Idol who has made a career out of other people's ideas—he's the Milton Berl of wrestling. Anybody who has a good idea, Idol goes, (imitating Idol's voice) "It's good for me." He loved hearing a 21 year old cocky arrogant punk kid from New York's perspective on the world. Therefore we came up with different approaches that had never been seen before. Therefore we had a lot of output on the direction the three of us took because I was afforded that opportunity by two big stars who were humble enough to say, "Let's hear what the kid has to offer."

CHAPTER 5 THE FAVORITE AUTHORS

Keller: Are there any writers you are particular fond of?

Dangerously: It's not really writers, it's newspapers. I try to read the *New York Times* as often as possible because I like how intellectual it is. I find myself reading the *Daily News* and the *New York Post* more than anything else because that's our audience. It's part of my job description to know what they're reading and what they identify with. The *New York Times* will have on the cover that the senior executive vice president of business affairs at General Motors has announced a tremendous trade agreement with Yugoslavia that will involve sending 42nd St. prostitutes over there for used carburetors and that's a major story. Meanwhile, the *New York Post* will tell you that Princess Diana is wearing a different panty hose today and therefore is definitely having an affair with Prince

Charles's plastic surgeon. That's what our audience is going to be talking about. People who know me know I blow \$50 easily at a newsstand once or twice a week because I read everything.

Keller: How about magazines?

Dangerously: I buy everything in sight. I like the *Playboy* interview. I read interview magazines. I read *Spin* magazine. I read *Sports Illustrated*. I read *Time* and *Newsweek* and enjoy them. I read counter-culture magazines like *Spy*. As easily as I will read a *New York* magazine, I'll read *Teen Beat*. There's another portion of our audience that I'm going to need to identify with. Anybody who cannot identify with Wayne's World and watch a girl go by and go "schwing!" is missing part of our audience. If you are unable to identify with that, then you are unable to identify with a section of our audience. I read rap magazines and I'm not a very big rap fan, but I sure read about who the biggest stars in rap are. I will occasionally watch "Yo, MTV Raps" to be up-to-date with what's hip and what's happening and what's now and what's tomorrow because there is a large portion of our audience that identifies with rap. If I can't at least throw in a mention or understand that rap is a major part of our society, then I'm missing out on my up-to-dateness. Usually when I go on the road back to New York, I usually have a large duffle bag filled to the rim with every publication I get my hands on. I read the *American Jewish Weekly* with as much enthusiasm as *Ebony* magazine.

Keller: Do you find yourself ever reading without tying it in to wrestling?

Dangerously: I enjoy knowledge. I enjoy knowing as much about everything as possible. I kind of view life as such a short period of time to get so much done and to experience so much, I just love information. I love facts. I love knowledge. It doesn't have to tie in. I don't have to utilize it in my career. I read so many publications, I get so many different perspectives on things it helps me formulate opinions. One of the great luxuries of my job is that it can be a catharsis for deep-seeded emotional distress that you might have over something. In being that we're on international television with such a broad-based audience gives you an incredible forum to express a viewpoint, I don't actively search except when I need to,

I don't spend every waking moment saying, "Wow, I can relate this to wrestling!" There are times when I'm dry on things, so I will watch MTV for a while to get some ideas, or I will watch CNN or I will watch an old or new movie. I find that my greatest inspiration comes from experiences.

I'll give you an example of what you're probably talking about. Being from a sheltered town like Scarsdale which is about 45 minutes from Times Square and upper-West side it take me 35 minutes, it would take anybody else 40 to 45. It's a suburb on the outskirts of Manhattan. Being from that sheltered existence, you have a compassion of course, this phony "I feel for every man who is not as fortunate as I am." Then again, having spent so much time in Manhattan and in New York, you also build up a shield that protects you from feeling for anybody. It makes you very cold-hearted. You really realize it's a dog-eat-dog world when you hang out in Manhattan as much as I do.

To my discredit, I had never in my life given even a penny to a panhandler, I had resented beggars and never liked them. I felt they were a blemish on the greatest city on the face of the planet, New York. One day in 1990 I had gone to a newsstand on W. 57th St. and it was about 4:30 in the morning when I went there before I went back home. I picked up a bunch of papers and I'm carrying them back to my car and there was an elderly man on the street. This was a bum. Make no mistake about it, it was a bum. A guy with terribly worn out shoes with holes in them, pants that reeked of urine, rags piled on top of each other to keep him warm, a hat where maybe 25 percent of the brim was left, a huge scarf with holes in it covering his ears to keep him warm, and he said, "H-h-h-hey, man, do you have any spare change?" I was walking to my car. You hear everything from pan-handlers in New York. Some of them have some great lines. This one said, "Please, I fought for this country." For some reason in his voice I detected some sincerity. I looked up and my initial reaction was, "Go get a job, asshole," but instead I said, "Oh yeah, where?" He said, "Korea." Not knowing if he had just picked it up off the news, the guy really seemed to have been there. I gave him five bucks. It's the only money I have given to a homeless person. I have always been sympathetic towards the homeless situation because in New York you get to see it so vividly. But I never really

thought of the fact that there are men with college educations or who have fought for democracy overseas in our wars that are on the streets having to beg another human being for a penny or a nickel or a dime. I can imagine you put a quarter in this guy's hand and he'd say, "God bless you." It affected me to the point where I had to do a Danger Zone a couple days later and discuss what kind of world we live in that would allow the Black Scorpion to challenge Sting. It was the first thing that came out of my mouth, that we live in a country where a man who has fought overseas for democracy can roam the streets outside some of the richest restaurants in the world—because right down the street is the Russian Tea Room where you can easily spend \$400 for a lunch—and say, "Please sir, can I have a penny or a dime. Oh, God bless you sir, you put a quarter in my hand." I tied that into the context of Black Scorpion challenging Sting and this is the type of world we live in where it's not fair. I find inspiration in unusual places. I got a lot of feedback from that interview, but I lived it, and I thought I felt it and needed a place to vent it and did in the context of what was going on.

CHAPTER 6

LIVING DANGEROUSLY IN LAS VEGAS

Keller: Under what circumstances did you leave Memphis?

Dangerously: Austin Idol, Tommy Rich, and I had all been fired from Memphis. It was right before the Summer and we were doing big business and we had just done the scaffold match and blew my knee out on the scaffold because I got involved. Tommy Rich was not getting along with management. Austin Idol as always was asking for his daily raise. They really weren't happy with the three of us together because we had quite a bit of leverage with the promotion. When the scaffold match was over, they felt that they had diminished a lot of our leverage and they wanted to move in a different direction with people who were both local because Idol and Rich were both flying. I'm sure that the day I looked people in the promotion in the eye and said, "Screw you! Give me more money," and I was 20 years old, I'm sure they said, "The first chance we have to screw him, we're gonna." And they did. It

was an "I-quit, you're fired" situation. The tension in the air was absolutely terrible. It was time to go and we did go. I was home and got medical attention to my knee and did a couple of independent dates with people I started with up there, D.C. Drake and Damien Kane. I was pondering my next move. I really didn't know where to go. Kevin Sullivan, who was the first person who ever brought me into a territory, into Florida, called me and said, "Hey, I hear you're out of Memphis," and gave me several phone numbers. He said call these people, tell them I'm your reference and have them call me so that they know that you're okay and I'll tell them to give you a job. Before I got to call anybody, Tommy Rich called me and said, "The AWA is looking for a new manager." I spoke to a few people there (and Ray Stevens) said, "We're taping in Las Vegas in two days. We saw the deal where you shaved Jerry Lawler's head," which was my first bit of national news as a manager, "And that scenario's pretty impressive, but how could it help but be when you're shaving Jerry Lawler's head in the middle of the Mid-South Coliseum." There was a riot, a full-blown riot. It took the police 45 minutes to get us out of the cage. He said, "That was very impressive. Of course, it is going to be impressive. We don't know you. You are an unknown commodity. We'll send you a ticket to Vegas. And if you're good, you have a job." I knew that they were on ESPN and this was my chance. He told me I was going to be asked to handle Dennis Condrey & Randy Rose, the Original Midnight Express. So I knew, if I was ever going to make it, you better take this ball and score a touchdown with it. So, I told them, "You don't have to send me a ticket. I'll fly out there." They were doing four weeks of television. I said, "Let me do the first week. Let me do my thing and give me a minute to talk and let me do my thing at ringside. If you are not impressed, I will fly myself back home and you don't have to pay me for the night. If I do a good job, give me a job and reimburse me for my ticket." The three of us went out there and it was different and it was newsworthy and it was exciting to the people at the showboat. When I got back to the dressing room, they handed me a check for my plane fare and said, "Welcome to the AWA."

Keller: What did you do during that hour? Set the scene.

Dangerously: Dennis Condrey had just months ago split on Jim Cornette and Bobby Eaton. Randy Rose was, to a national audience, was an unknown even though he had been in the business for 15 years. I had remembered everything that Austin Idol and Tommy Rich had taught me. I knew that no matter what, it had to be a scenario like what James Cagney had said in interviews, "It doesn't matter what they think about or what they talk about, but when you leave the room, let it be you." Do something that makes them say, "I want to see them again." I just figured if we went out there and rolled



PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY AND THE ORIGINAL MIDNIGHT EXPRESS (Photo by Wade Keller)

up our sleeves and worked our asses off and let those people know we're here and this is our show that they will say, "Hey, there's something special going on here." We set out to do that and the Vegas audience took to the presentation obviously.

Keller: What were a couple things that you learned in the AWA versus the Memphis crowds?

Dangerously: Vegas was about excitement. Vegas was about always being larger than life, walking around a casino as if everybody is trying to take your picture at all times even if nobody is even looking at you. Las Vegas is about excitement. During my AWA days, I faced harsh criticism that I was a Roddy Piper wanna be because I did interviews at the time that were in many ways similar to the wild and crazy and out of control interviews that he used to do back in 1984 in the WWF. Sure, Piper was a tremendous inspiration because he was so

exciting for me to watch. I loved to watch him, therefore sure you take from what you admire. All I knew was I could be as articulate as I wanted to be, but if I wanted the people to remember the points I wanted to get across, in an entertaining manner I could very easily do an interview where I said, "Good evening ladies and gentleman, my name is Paul E. Dangerously and I'm here to expostulate on the virtues of Dennis Condrey and Randy Rose, professionally known as The Original Midnight Express." I had better do that while running around, screaming around Larry Nelson who was interviewing me, screaming into the camera while getting blood-red in the face, and change my inflection from screaming to whispering. If you bore those people for one second, 'click,' they're watching VH-1 or something else. It was always entertain them and get your message across through entertainment and get your message across in an entertaining way or they wouldn't accept your message since they weren't watching you.

Keller: From whom did you learn the most that would be the most surprising to people?

Dangerously: I learned a lot from Verne Gagne. I learned from him more than almost anybody else in the history of this business because I learned exactly what I didn't want to end up being. Verne Gagne was not an idiot. How could you be an idiot and amass that kind of fortune and draw that type of money. He just got so hard-headed and stubborn and set in his ways, he refused to accept that times had changed and he had to change with it. I would love to see Jack Brisco vs. Terry Funk today, I just don't know if that's what everybody else wants to see, therefore we have to give them Cactus Jack vs. Flyin' Brian, not to say those two are any less talented than Funk and Brisco; they are equally talented, if not more, but it's just a different style of wrestling. And I might want to see something, but if you ask me to present something, I'm going to present something that most people want to see. The masses dictate what should be shown. Verne just never accepted that. Verne said, "No, they're going to watch what I want to watch because I like it, so everybody else will like it." He once yelled at me for mentioning Jon Bon Jovi on an interview about New Jersey. He said, "Well, isn't Jerry Vale from New Jersey? Why don't you talk about him?" I said, "Because nobody's

going to identify with Jerry Vale." "Well, I will." Verne said. I said, "That's one person!"

Keller: Were you any more mature with the way you dealt with them?

Dangerously: Hey, I've been very immature with my dealings. Hey, I'm only 26. You're gonna have immature behavior that's inherent with your age. I did a lot of things that I look back on and say, "Awe, I was just a kid when I did that." But then again, I don't regret a lot of them. And especially dealing with the people I dealt with. In essence, in looking back, I think I was a hell of a lot more mature than they were because I wanted to learn and they knocked me for it. I used to sit in the control room and eat my lunch in a corner and watch not only everybody do their interviews, but watch how the tape editors and the sound mixers and everybody else were doing it because I wanted to learn that aspect of the business. They would come in and throw me out. They would come in and say, "What the hell are you doing here?" I'd say, "I'm learning." They'd say, "How are you learning? You should be out there watching interviews." "Well, I'm watching interviews on the monitor, but I'm also watching how that guy raises the volume if you start to whisper and how this guy starts the tape eight seconds before you even say, 'three-two-one' and I'm learning different aspects." They knocked me for it. Was I immature for wanting to be in there or were they immature for saying I had no right to learn that. So maybe my reaction was immature because I stomped my feet and said, "Well, fine!" And I'd walk out there and pout. It was an immature reaction from an immature action on their part not to let me learn.

Keller: How did they treat you as a manager?

Dangerously: They paid me the same as they paid my tag team. I can't bitch about how they paid or how they treated me. They treated me very well in that on my days off I was always flown back to New York. We were given the ball to run with in the AWA. July 11, 1987 through the end of our tenure there which was six months later, a great deal of their television time was invested in us. I cannot bitch about that treatment. Then again, they wouldn't have invested in us if we weren't worth investing in. They would have dropped us right away. To be honest

with you, when they tried to get rid of Dennis and Randy for a penny-wise and dollar foolish economic decision, they tried to keep me and went out of their way to keep me. I can't really complain about that portion of the treatment. I just resent that they were against me learning and me expanding my mind to different aspects of the business and me growing within my role. And it was like a sixth grade teacher not letting you graduate because he doesn't want you to go to jr. high school. I wanted to keep growing and at every turn they would be against it. I could never understand why because I was making for a 21 and 22 year old kid in his first year in the business what I thought was all the money in the world for that place. They were paying great to the point of generosity. I had no plans for leaving. The schedule was, compared to other organizations, easy. I had just come out of Memphis where I was driving 3000 miles a week and here I was being flown everywhere, staying in a little bit better quality of a hotel, and on national television, and being recognized everywhere I went. I mean this was heaven. I wasn't leaving. There was no way. We had other offers. Dallas had tried to steal us and we wouldn't go. I told Dennis and Randy, "Maybe it's the right thing to do, but why blow this. This is a great job to have."

Keller: What do you think of Greg Gagne?

Dangerously: I think the unfortunate thing about Greg is that—I want to be fair in this assessment because this is a kid who grew up dreaming of taking over his dad's business and doesn't have a job now and doesn't have a business. This is a son of a multi-millionaire who never earned a million dollars in his life. So I don't want to sit here and label Greg a prick, but I would certainly say Greg provided a great deal of resistance to my learning process because he resented that I was so young and had not taken the physical punishment that so many other people from the previous generation had to endure. I certainly am grateful for the fact that Ray Stevens was always there to pull me aside and say, "Don't let anything he says bother you. If you want to learn, you just be stubborn enough to watch anyway and learn anyway. Don't let him stunt your enthusiasm to grow and to learn." I don't know Greg personally. I only dealt with him on a business level. As an employee I can attest that he surely did not create a

situation that would improve morale. Professionally, I did not particularly get along with him. If you asked him, I'm sure he'd say I am a snot-nosed punk kid from New York." Then I can stand here and stomp my feet and say, "He's a rich kid from Minnesota who ran his dad's business into the ground." We can sit and insult each other. I think the bottom line is we had a personality clash and didn't get along. He just couldn't take his dad's business or steer his dad in a direction that would compete with McMahon and Turner. What happened to Greg was he stood still on that escalator and he went all the way down to the bottom into the basement.

Keller: What did you think of Nick Bockwinkel?

Dangerously: When I went to the AWA, I always thought of Nick Bockwinkel as the other half of that combination with Bobby Heenan. I had met Nick several times as a photographer. I didn't know him too well. I met Nick when he came to Memphis a couple times, and Louisville. Nick is one of the greatest gentlemen that I have ever met in my life in or out of wrestling. Much like Ray Stevens, he wanted to teach anybody young who wanted to learn. He would offer advice. If you went to him for advice, he would take so much time. There were some questions I had for Nick Bockwinkel that I didn't understand his answer at first. I had to ask him again, and he would repeat it. He would tell a third time. He had the patience to go over something that a donkey could grasp in five minutes. It would take me an hour to learn a simple thing, but he realized the kid wasn't an imbecile, it just was a point he's having problems with. I will explain it to him again. I not only admire Nick Bockwinkel, I have so much respect for him, I cannot describe it in words.

Keller: How about Curt Hennig?

Dangerously: Curt Hennig, to me, is one of the greatest talents in the history of this industry. It is no secret that I was going back to the AWA after leaving there to manage Curt Hennig, then refused to go back because they would not put me and Curt together. They wouldn't allow us to become a unit because they thought in their paranoid view that we were using our ESPN exposure to get across to the public before we were going to jump to the WWF together, which was a ridiculous



CURT HENNIG, ALMOST PAIRED WITH DANGEROUSLY IN THE AWA

accusation. It was so far-fetched and so paranoid it's not even worth denying. Curt Hennig, any time I have had any discussion with anybody, either high up or on the low end of the totem pole in the WWF, has always been the first person I mention when they ask, "Well, if you could manage anybody, who would you manage?" He is one of the people who is definitely not just going to lead this industry through the 90s, but he is going to take us into the next decade. He is one of the smartest, one of the brightest, one of the most innovative, one of the most creative people I have ever met in my life. And don't forget this, here is a guy who grew up under Larry Hennig. He grew up in the old-timers' school. He grew up the old-timers' way. He learned their rules and thought process and now understands how to update them into the current situation in this particular industry. Curt Hennig for me is a role model.

CHAPTER 7 THE SOPHOMORE JINX?

Keller: How did you leave the AWA?

Dangerously: I walked out with Dennis Condrey and Randy Rose on December 30, 1987 and started immediately for Jerry Blackwell's promotion in Georgia, Southern Championship Wrestling, and I was there from January through the end of April, but in the mean time, hooked up with

Windy City. At the same time I was doing both of those, I had a vastly increased role on Joe Pedicino's show, "Pro Wrestling New York" and got tremendous notoriety when I fired Gordon Solie on the air.

Keller: Give some background on how that came about?

Dangerously: It was an interesting show, but it was losing money. Pedicino needed an influx of cash and the guy who was willing to stand up and invest the money in the show was a gentleman by the name of Patrick Schaeffer. Schaeffer was good with ledgers and P & L statements, but he also wanted to be on television. Well, that created a problem. Which host would go? Well, it was Pedicino's show, so he certainly wasn't gonna throw himself off the air. He was hosting the show on the air, so the situation came down: somebody needs to fire Gordon. How do you fire a guy who Pedicino got half his market's cleared because he could give to them the dean of the wrestling announcers, Gordon Solie. And Joe truly admired Gordon, not only professionally, but personally. Joe was honored to work with Gordon. Here he came to a situation where Gordon was out and there was no doubt about it, Gordon was out. I had a Danger Zone and Pedicino called me that night and I had just gotten back from Carolton, Ga. and I was staying at Randy Rose's apartment. Joe told me about the change in ownership and he said Gordon was out. His voice was quivering and he was to the point of tears and he said, "How do you fire Gordon Solie?" I said, "You don't, I do." "What do you mean, you can't call him and tell him." "Well, Joe, I've got a way to get rid of Gordon Solie and it will be one of the most memorable things your show has ever done."

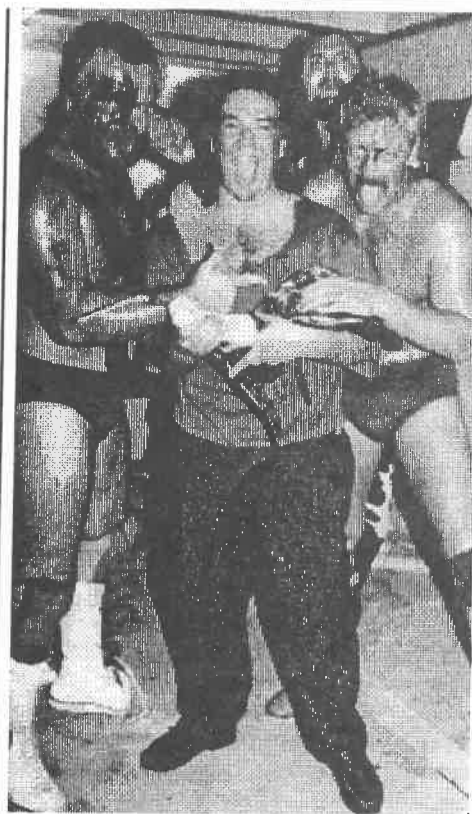
We did it, and I fired Gordon Solie on the air and suffered one of the worst verbal barrages since my sixth grade economics professor because Gordon cut me—whew!—he gave me a lesson in journalistic ethics on the air that made me want to run home and ask mommy for a hug. I mean, he just drilled me and it was one of not only Paul E. Dangerously's finest and most controversial moments, but it was one of Gordon Solie's finest moments in years. I mean, to get Gordon Solie to stand up for himself like that was reminiscent of when he would show true disgust with people's actions in the late-70s and early-80s on Georgia Championship Wrestling. I was

happy because I brought it out of him. I don't think he was too happy I brought it out of him. Plus, the situation that I was with a fledgling promotion, Windy City, and independents, it kept my name in the headlines of the industry which I was very afraid of losing when I left the AWA because I didn't want the people in the business to forget that here was a prospect that one of the major promotion's ought to suck up real soon.

Keller: Talk about Windy City. That was a step where you went beyond being a performer and became a booker.

Dangerously: Well, it happened so fast, I never had time to evaluate it. Sam DiCero was the owner of Windy City and he wanted Dennis Condrey, Randy Rose, and myself for some shows because he was adamant about going against the Gagnes for the Midwest territory. He couldn't afford us. And I really wanted to keep Dennis, Randy, and myself together. I said to them, "Let me go up, let me deal with this guy, let me get some things set up to where he can afford us." Sam flew me to Chicago. I said, "Listen, you can't afford us on talent fees. I'll help you with creative input if you give me the people I work with a piece of the action." He agreed. He was in desperate need of creative attention at the time. So I called back Dennis and Randy and I said, "I'm gonna need eight weeks to set this thing up, but when it's set up, there's going to be some big money here, because Sam wanted to run the Amphitheater."

I told Sam, if we do it right, we can make a big profit in that building because the rent was dirt cheap. It was on Hallstead Street in the worst section of Chicago, it was a dingy arena. They gave me the ball up there. To his credit, Sam never second-guessed a decision I made. He never interfered. Some of his people must have run to him and said, "What are you doing!" and he said, "I'm going to try this for awhile and see where business goes with it." I was not a very big proponent of flying in a lot of big names to give instant credibility to the local talent. I felt that Paul E. Dangerously did not have to be the manager that was promoted and presented to the public as "the" manager. Tony Montana lived in Chicago and therefore had more of a right to have the opportunity to carry the ball at the top of the heap. I felt that though we did have a certain amount of outside talent, big names that were necessary to bring in, that



PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY, THE ORIGINAL MIDNIGHT EXPRESS, AND BAM BAM BIGELOW
(Photo by Wade Keller)

the crew we had there was the most important to utilize. Again, I was never second-guessed. I never had anything I came up with questioned or even a raised eyebrow. It was sink or swim. We went to the Amphitheatre with Bruiser Brody vs. John Nord and did \$45,000 without any television and a limited ad budget. The rest was the local guys. We had a tremendous tag team feud going on between The Beach Boys and The Tokyo Bullets. My only philosophy was that there was going to be something there for everybody on that show, whether you liked the Memphis style of brawling or the old-day Chicago AWA Dick the Bruiser, Crusher, out of control beat the hell out of each other with chairs and tables style of wrestling, or whether you were a fan of the Lou Thesz and Pat O'Connor style of wrestling, or whether you were a fan of the WWF glitz and glamour, or the NWA excitement and blood and mayhem, or whether you a fan of midgets or lady wrestlers, we had anything that anybody could conceivably want on that show. We tried to mix it in, put it all together, and give everyone something to see. It was a great learning experience for me because I got to listen to people who

never would have given advice unless they wanted things for themselves. In the meantime, when I was working with Windy City and continued my relationship with Windy City while I worked in Alabama, then I got to work under Eddie Gilbert, to say that that was an education in itself doesn't do justice to what Eddie Gilbert gave me access to witness and to learn and to be educated on.

Keller: *From working first hand with Gilbert, does he really have a pulse on pro wrestling?*

Dangerously: Oh, he has a vision. I mean, Eddie has a vision and what is so unique about Eddie is that, you know the old line from the Beatles song, "The Girl With Kaleidoscope Eyes." Eddie views the world with kaleidoscope glasses. He never sees the same thing in the same light. I first met Eddie Gilbert when I was first starting to run the fan clubs and when I was doing a bulletin by the name of the "Wrestling Times" at the end of 1982 when he was still wrestling for the WWF. Even then he was a man with a vision, talking about wanting to do a lot of things in the business. Half the time I had no idea what he was talking about, but I knew this guy was born to do this. That is his mission in life. That is all he's ever wanted to do.

Keller: *Has that hurt him?*

Dangerously: No. I don't see how that can. Eddie has had so many traumatic experiences. I always look at Eddie and smile because I always see Eddie five years down the road doing his acceptance speech. How many times have you heard somebody go up and accept a Grammy, how many record groups who are overnight sensations come up there and say, "Man, you have no idea the shit we went through to get here. I mean, first we got fired by our agent, then we had to send out press releases on stationary that we had to make up with our kid brother's crayons. Then we got picked up and right before the album was recorded, there was an earthquake that destroyed the studio. And then we went to another studio and that studio went bankrupt. Then after that studio went bankrupt, we made the album, but they actually erased the master tape. The second one didn't sound as good, so the studio dumped us, so we had to go to another studio and after seven-and-a-half long years, we finally get this album ready to get

out, but it doesn't get promoted so the second one is really the first one and that one got promoted and got to the top and if you thought this was easy, you don't know what you're talking about. But we finally made it." You sit there and then Rolling Stone will do an in-depth interview and they ask, "Did you ever want to quit?" "Man, every night I wanted to quit, but something in the morning when I woke up made me stick to it and I persevered." I kind of think that will be the Eddie Gilbert story. I mean, the guy has gone through hell and sooner or later, he hasn't quit yet, to me he



EDDIE GILBERT AND PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY
(Photo Courtesy Heyman Collection)

has gone through what would cause any mere mortal man to say, "Enough!" Instead, he sits there and says, "Nope, I'm gonna do it, come hell or high water. Hell or high water will come." He'll get it.

Keller: *What is the word to describe him?*

Dangerously: Driven. He really is a man who always believed the most in life you can achieve is to be the best that you can possibly be. You never had to be better than that other guy. You just had to be better than you were last night. And tomorrow you had to be better than you are today. That was the way he was driven. Constantly improve, constantly learn from your mistakes, and acknowledge those mistakes. Admit it and say, "Damn, I hope I never make that mistake again, but if I do, I will know I made that mistake twice so I will

have to learn two different things from that one mistake. He's driven and he's driven to be the best he can be. Sure you learn from being around a man like that. He wanted us to be the best we could be in who we were and not compare it to anybody else.

Keller: *How was the experience in Alabama with the CWF different than your other experiences?*

Dangerously: Continental was a very difficult time for me because it was the first time I had that kind of responsibility placed on me. I was very aware of the criticism that this was the sophomore jinx and the kid that was involved in the shaving of Jerry Lawler's head and the kid that then went on ESPN and was involved in one of the last good runs for the AWA, was now, and I believe the quote was, "languishing" in Alabama. I never looked at it that way. I looked at it as, "We're gonna make this thing a success." In retrospect, it got to me to the point where I really didn't think clearly and was so distracted by it that it affected what I was supposed to be doing and what I was supposed to be thinking of. I don't think in all honesty I gave myself as much of a chance there as I should have and didn't do justice to the people I was working with. I was so distracted, wondering which direction my career was going in because, see, when I went to Alabama I turned down another offer to go to Dallas. And that was in more markets and was a larger promotion. I guess I was a 22 year old kid who was starting to wonder, "Will I be hopping around territories my entire career or is there something bigger for me in this business? What am I truly destined to do?" I got so bogged down with that, it had a negative effect on what I was doing.

Keller: *Were you very concerned about quickly wanting to get to one of the major promotions or was it a confusion about what you were going to do with your career in general?*

Dangerously: The first year went so fast, it was a blur. I cut my teeth in Memphis, Alabama was a settling period. I said, "Hey, this is what I'm doing for a career." This is not some whirlwind experience where one day I'm in my Manhattan office, one-third of a profitable public relations firm, six months later I'm on ESPN running down 49 states in the country and performing in front of people at the Showboat in Las Vegas. This is a job,

an occupation, and there are responsibilities that come along with it like any other job or career. It stopped being, "Oh my God, I can't believe this is happening to me." It was, "Good morning. Let's see what responsibilities I have. Today I have to go to work in Meridian, Mississippi and tomorrow I have to go to work in Gadsden, Alabama." Alabama is when reality really hit me in the face. Not in the bad way. It's when the whirlwind stopped. It was when I first had a chance to take a breather.

Keller: Because of that, did you learn more about managing or was that a time when you didn't learn about other things because you were learning so much about yourself?

Dangerously: What I learned in Alabama dealt with how to be a person who makes his living in the industry of pro wrestling.

Keller: Did you have any regrets about not going to Dallas?

Dangerously: No. I have no regrets about any career decisions. I look back on some of them and I say, "Oh, man, what a dumb-ass move." Or, "Oh, man, imagine if I did that!" But I justify it to myself as saying, "Look at where I am now." As the CEO of the Dangerous Alliance, getting to work with the people I work with now. I can't sit back and say, "I'd be here if I did this." Everything I went through was an experience and I'm glad I had all those experiences. If I had other experiences, I don't think I'd be here.

CHAPTER 8

ON TO TBS

Keller: Was it from Continental that you went to WCW?

Dangerously: Eddie and I quit Continental on Sept. 28, 1988. He immediately went to the NWA which at that time was about to be purchased by Ted Turner. I had my car in Alabama and I was going to drive home. On my way home, I stopped by to see Eddie at the old Techwood Studios and to see some of the guys I had known through the years. And Tully Blanchard and Arn Anderson had just bolted to the WWF. More than one person pulled me aside and said, "If there was ever an opportunity for you here, today is your day." I drove back home to New York and on November 1, 1988 which is the same day Turner Broadcasting took over the NWA

and subsequently WCW, I started with Dennis Condrey and Randy Rose.

Keller: How did it end up being different from day one when you walked in there working for one of the "big two?"

Dangerously: It's highly competitive because you know how many people want to make it there. You think of how many people that would hang out at the Ramada Hotel in New York City saying they would like to be with the WWF. Then you think of all the people who actually go to the wrestling school who said they wanted to be on TBS or on the WWF network. Then you think of all the people that you met in the independents who said, "Gee, I'd like to get a break. Gee, I'd like to get a start. Gee, I'd like to get a tryout. I wish somebody would just notice me." Then you think of all the people who made it to the territories. Then you think of all the people who have made it to the main events in the territories who never had the opportunity to work for a national promotion. There are so many people who would give anything to have the opportunity that you've been given. And you've been fortunate enough to be given that opportunity. If you think back to the work that was necessary to get there, you tend to utilize your television time and you're time in front of the crowd, you try to get the most out of every moment you have the spotlight on you. You have to utilize that time to the best of your abilities because there is somebody waiting in the wings to get that position away from you the very first chance they get.

Keller: This was the first time you had worked with a manager of Jim Cornette's caliber. Was that an unbelievable learning experience?

Dangerously: There is nobody of his caliber with the exception of Heenan. This guy's in a league of his own. He just trampled every bit of competition he had for years. He also had in Bobby Eaton—I don't know Stan, I never worked directly with Stan, but I've worked with Bobby in the Dangerous Alliance—who is an absolute treasure. Cornette is the type of person who if you have to go on the air with Jim Cornette where he represents his team and you represent yours, no matter what you say and what you do, you had better be every moment of your television time better than you have ever been or he will gobble you up faster than Joe Pedicino at a smorgasbord. This guy is so fast and so sharp and so brilliant, that if you leave

yourself open, he is like a shark that smells blood. He'll kill ya'. That is why everything that he has been involved in has made money. He brings out the best in the opposing side. You know you're in there with the best. It's like if I were to put on a pair of boxing gloves and step into the ring with Downtown Bruno, or Harvey Whippleman as he's known now, I'm gonna dance around, laugh a little bit, not be too concerned. I know if I make a mistake, I won't be dead tomorrow. If you put a pair of boxing gloves on and throw me in the ring with Mike Tyson, I'm gonna be swinging and kicking with everything I've got. I know I'm in the ring with somebody who has no qualms with going "poooooomphhhhhhhhh." I don't know how you're going to spell that, Wade, but that's my expression. That forces you to be a better fighter. I might not be as impressive to you against Mike Tyson as I am against Downtown Bruno, but I'll promise you I will be a better fighter because I'm fighting for my life.

Cornette, especially at that time, was at the top of his game. He had to be because he had never been accepted by the fans before. Finally, after years of seeing this whimpy little mama's boy from Louisville, Kentucky, they got the devil's version of Jim Cornette, which was a New York version, a harder edge, a more sadistic, a more cut-throat, not humorous in his insults, but sickening. His insults were so vile, they even cheered Jim Cornette against this pseudo-human being by the name of Paul E. Dangerously. Anytime, whether it was on the mic or in the ring, where I was involved with something with Jim Cornette, I had to be at my best because otherwise I was through.

Keller: Fundamentally, how do you see yourself differing from Jim Cornette as far as your effect on the audience?

Cornette: I think the public perceives Jim Cornette as this guy that could be a talk show host who is a spokesman for his wrestlers and whose enthusiasm for being involved in this rough and macho sport, of which he is neither rough nor macho, carries him out to ringside to where he gloats or he takes great pleasure in utilizing a cheapshot to his team's advantage. I don't think the public sees him as sadistic in enjoying smashing a guy's forehead with a tennis racket. They view him as a man who does that because that's what it takes for his team to win. But I think they also perceive

him as a genuinely funny guy who is tremendously witty and he is. And he is the guy you want to like, but he won't let you. I think the public perceives Paul E. Dangerously as a miserable, angry, hostile, high-stressed prick who thinks that New York is the center of the universe—and I do think that—who has no redeeming qualities and who doesn't smash a guy in the face with a telephone because that's what it takes to win. He smashes a guy in the face with the telephone because he gets off on it. He's sadistic enough to get off on it. He has absolutely no physical capabilities of his own, so he lives this machismo dream through his wrestlers and justifies his own manhood by saying, "I'm a bad-ass because you can't beat me up," even though the reason that you can't beat him up is because of people like Bobby Eaton and Arn Anderson and Rick Rude and Steve Austin who are ready to stomp your ass if you lay a hand on their manager. In that essence, the people love to hate Paul E. Dangerously. While it's enjoyable to dislike Jim Cornette, they truly revel in their hatred for Paul E. Dangerously. They look at the guy at ringside or the guy with the microphone who has a cellular phone in his hand and they see someone who they would just love to reach into the television and smash in the face.

Keller: Was there any professional jealousy on either of your parts during your run when you were feuding with each other?

Dangerously: No, because we were each other's protection. As long as there was a Jim Cornette for the people to like, there was a job for Paul E. Dangerously. As long as there was a Paul E. Dangerously for Jim Cornette to chase around, Jim Cornette had job security. We were the antithesis of each other and therefore there is no Superman without Lex Luthor, there is no Batman without the Joker. It was so unique. It was introduced with that scene of Jim Cornette getting smacked across the face with a telephone and bleeding, for crying outloud, on TBS. The verbal battles and the constant chases and it was really a constant game of one-upsmanship that the public seemed to enjoy because here was this new guy playing the way that Cornette first played, and here was the master Cornette, who upstaged the new guy. But then the new guy came back with another gameplan. It was just back and forth. As long as he was there, I was there. As long as I was there, he

could be there as long as he wanted to be.

Keller: How did you see Jim Cornette changing as he began to be the manager who was getting cheers from the fans?

Dangerously: The only one that had done it with any bit of success was Lou Albano with the British Bulldogs and then with Barry Windham & Mike Rotunda. By the time I came to the NWA/WCW, they wanted to like Jim Cornette. They know he's witty, they know he's smart, they know he's talented, and they liked his jokes. It's like Don Rickles in Vegas is mean to his audience. They hated him for years until



PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY PRESENTS RIC FLAIR WITH THE WRESTLING PRESS INTERNATIONAL MAN OF THE YEAR AWARD AT STUDIO 54

(Photo courtesy David Hammond)

they realized, "Hey, this guy's really funny when he insults me." When I was in seventh grade, the Rolling Stones played Shea Stadium. This girl that was in my class came back the next day and said, "You wouldn't believe this. I was sitting right up there near the stage and Mick Jagger spit on me." Boy, I'd jump on stage and fight the guy, but it was an honor for her to be spit on by Mick Jagger. That's what happened with Cornette. The audience realized that he was so funny when he did it and it was a damn good insult. So by the time I got there, they wanted to like him.

Keller: Were your days with Cornette to this date some of the most fun times in your

career?

Dangerously: The funniest thing was there wasn't pressure to be creative. The Midnight-*Midnight* situation was so creatively stimulating that I had to edit out 90 percent of my own ideas because I was up at that time seriously—and anybody who knows me can attest to this—22 hours a day because I was so excited about what was going on and the creative freedom and just the minds that were working together that I could never sleep, I could never lay down. As soon as I laid down, I would have to write it down or dictate it into a tape recorder. I was so pumped at the time that it wasn't draining, it was exhilarating. The deeper we got into it, and everybody thinks the deeper you get into a feud, the more challenging it is to stay fresh and creative—the deeper we got into it, the more exciting it got.

Keller: Would you ever like to take on the role Cornette took, accepting cheers from the fans?

Dangerously: You know, I don't think so. Dice Clay was an anti-hero and was accepted for about a year and then everybody said, "To hell with him." People started to get pissed at themselves for liking the guy. Howard Stern is the exception that makes the rule because here is a truly villainous persona that the people say while laughing, "This guy is great!" I think people not only enjoy the shock value of Stern, but I think people can appreciate his incredible understanding of his medium. There are exceptions, like Dice's brief success and Stern's constant and every-growing success. I don't see the people embracing Paul E. Dangerously. To be very honest with you, I've been a cynical prick all my life, this is just a hell of a way to exploit it and make a living at it. It's funny, my mother, the first time she ever saw what I do for a living—which was quite recently to be quite honest with you, she never watched anything that I did...

Keller: Why not?

Dangerously: Wrestling's just not something that my mother would watch. But when my mother finally watched what I do for a living, she turned to my father and said, "Do they really pay him for this?" And my father said, "Yeah." And she said, "Why would anybody pay him for something he's done and been all of his life." So, in order for people to embrace Paul E. Dangerously, I

would have to change and I don't foresee that happening.

Keller: What if somebody came along who redefined what being villainous was to the point where the fans need Paul E. Dangerously to save them? Is that possible?

Dangerously: Sure. I heard cheers for 12 minutes of my career. That was when Arn Anderson and I teamed up at the Meadowlands on July 3rd, 1991 against Missy Hyatt and P.N. News. You were there. There were a great many factors involved in that. Number one, I was co-hosting WCW's "Pro Wrestling New York," and because I mentioned New York so much and because I was doing the show with Jim Ross who was from Oklahoma, therefore I had to educate him on the idiosyncracies of a New Yorker's life, they kind of appreciated me being their representative to the wrestling world of New York. That's (a). Then (b), they hated Missy because people from New York and New Jersey hate broken promises and for

half received with boos. I got on the mic and upstaged P.N. News because I did my own rap which ended up with the line: "You've got a body like a whale and a face like a mutt, and everyone here knows that your partner is a slut." For anybody to call Missy Hyatt a slut and to tell it like it was, was kind of like the Jesse Ventura syndrome. They said, "Yeah, he's right. He's our boy."

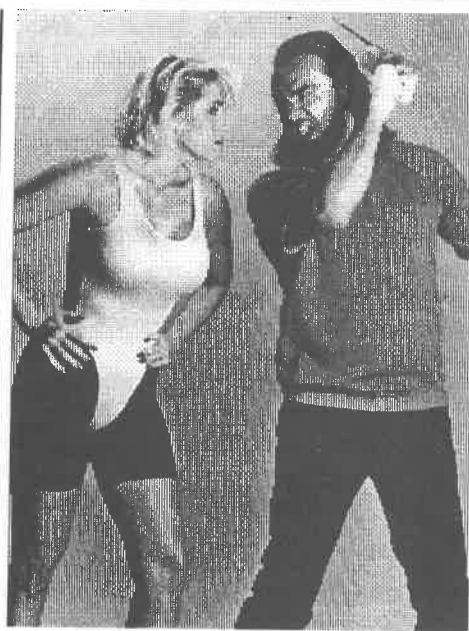
I see Jake Roberts being as far as you can go in that light of being hated or being villainous. But at the same time, I am always trying to push the edge, be right up against the border of what is accepted and what is not and really don't foresee—things change, as you well know—but don't see the public changing. It's one thing to embrace someone that you see on TV because you see him as the savior because this is the butt-kicking bad-ass or this is the guy who can outsmart Jake Roberts. You have to have quantities for them to embrace. I don't see any redeeming qualities being presented by Paul E. Dangerously on television. Jim Cornette was presenting redeeming qualities on TV. He was funny, he was genuinely entertaining. Like I said, much like Don Rickles or to an extent, like Stern. He just said my wife is sleeping with the whole neighborhood, but boy he said it in the wittiest manner.

CHAPTER 9

SO MUCH FOR TBS

Keller: You left WCW under some heated circumstances involving Ric Flair when he was booker. What happened?

Dangerously: Whew! WCW was the victim of incompetent leadership under Jim Herd. Much like my earlier description of Verne Gagne, Jim Herd is not a moron, he's not an imbecile, he's not a stupid man. He's a very smart man. He has to be, otherwise how could he have attained the positions of power that he has attained over the years in the various endeavors he's been involved in. But for this particular venture and this particular industry at this particular time and place, he did not have a clue how to maintain a profitable corporation that interfaced with the other subsidiaries of this major conglomerate and at the same time keep morale at the level that would encourage employees to give their best efforts. His major flaw was his lack to create a stable environment at the top of the corporate structure. And the constant changes in authority created a situation that



MISSY HYATT & PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY
(Photo courtesy World Championship Wrestling)

anyone who attained power instantly became paranoid and was justified to be so, because under Jim Herd being paranoid didn't necessarily mean that everyone wasn't against you.

I have always believed in a healthy, competitive environment, but not when if you cut that guy's throat, you're gonna succeed and if you don't, then he's going to get you. That's not a healthy environment, that's a self-destructive competitive environment that will destroy a company—and it did. What quite simply happened was when the committee was in power, I had certain friends on that committee who fell out of power when that committee was disbanded and the new people in charge justifiably thought the whole world was against them. Because, quite honestly, the whole world was against ya'. That includes Jim Herd. He would hire somebody and say, "I hope you do the best job possible." And the moment you would walk out the door, he would say, "I hate the miserable son of a bitch, I hope he fails because I can't wait to fire him." How can you succeed in that environment? It was a tremendous pressure cooker.

And my fuse was at its shortest because the company was trying to get me to stop being a manager and get me to become a full-time commentator. At the time, I didn't want to do that because I had spent all my time on the inside of the industry as a manager. You were asking me to switch jobs now, from a manager to an announcer. Well, I didn't know if the



PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY CHOKING P.N. NEWS
(Photo by Wade Keller)

years she came on TV and promised everybody that she was a slut. Well, if she didn't actually go up into the audience and do every single guy there, they were pissed at her. "(In a New York accent) You don't want to do me? Screw you! I hate you." Number three, they looked at P.N. News, not as the rapmaster, but as a big, fat slob, because that's a vicious audience there who views everybody in the worst possible light. Meanwhile, they admired Arn Anderson who was a brutal competitor who looked into the camera and said, "I'm gonna kick your ass." And he always did. When we came out, we were half received well and

transition would work, and if it didn't work, I was wondering if I would get the opportunity to be a manager again. I was afraid of it not succeeding and then I would be out. I was saying was there a guarantee there that if this new venture didn't work out would you get your job back. Of course, that is a difficult promise to give someone, but when you are young and planning an entire career in an industry, that is a guarantee that you want and in a way have a right to ask for.

Well, I resisted it and got swept up very quickly in a pressure cooker and it resulted in what is, whether it was right or wrong, an early termination on September 14, 1989 when just everybody, and I mean everybody's temper was absolutely out of control and nobody was thinking correctly and I ended up being fired for something I just did not do. I was fired allegedly for an interview which I had done in which the premise was supposed to be, "I'm up to something and you'll find out when I want you to know." I said it and was told I didn't say it and was fired for it. I mean, anybody that knows the situation knew that when I walked into Centre Stage on that day, the decision had already been made to fire me. There was an attempt made to set me up and I didn't grab the bait, but it didn't mater. I didn't fall into the trap and I was fired anyway. It was like, "We couldn't get him anyway, so let's fire him anyway."

Keller: Talk a little bit about what you did between your two stays in WCW?

Dangerously: When I was fired, I had just turned 24 years old. It was three days after my 24th birthday. Just like in Alabama, reality slaps you, it's like, "What do I do now?" There were a lot of people within WCW who immediately tried to sooth the tensions and resolve the matter and I was very angry. Very, very angry. I was angry over being fired because I was at the time co-hosting the "Main Event" on Sunday nights. It was the highest rated show, not just of the wrestling shows, not just on TBS, it was the highest rated show on cable for three months in 1989. The year 1989 was a terrible year for television and this show was a success. And this was the only year in the history of TBS that Sunday nights beat out Saturday nights. They were in the 3's. After I left and the regime that fired me had creative control, they did phenomenal number, they did across the board phenomenal numbers. But I worked very

hard. Every single show with the exception of Brother Love that came after Piper's Pit was deemed as nothing more than a copy of it. Though the Danger Zone first faced that stigma, we made something out of the Danger Zone and that took some work, too. And now, boom!, out in the cold and fired and looking at remnants of a career that was just taking off and all of a sudden, bang, you're shot out of the sky. I seeked other employment after being fired and was told that there was opportunity, but Jim Herd refused to let me out of my contract, but also refused to pay me and told me to rot in hell, as far as he was concerned, or in New York, which he said is the same thing. I just merely wanted to get on with my career. I called up several times and said, "Why don't you just let me out of my contract? I won't ask you for the money that you owe me. Let me go so I can go work elsewhere." I was told no and was even asked if I was going to "run to my daddy." And that was the term that was used, "my daddy" who was a lawyer in New York "and have him try to sue us." I got so pissed off at that statement that I said, "No, but I'm gonna teach you a lesson now about screwing with another human being's life so that next time you do this to somebody, you will think twice about the ramifications that are involved in treating a human being like he was a piece of shit." And with my own money, I went out and hired one of the best known entertainment lawyers in New York City, Bruce Gold. Number one, because he came very highly recommended. Number two, because he had nothing to do with my family so they couldn't say, "Oh, he's sending his family after us." And number three, because throughout my whole tenure through WCW were jokes that were made out of humor, but also fear, "Hey, is your dad really this cut-throat New York Jew lawyer?" Here is this Georgian mentality that any Jew lawyer from New York is a cut-throat bastard lawyer. Well, I hired a cut-throat New York Jew lawyer. And we butted heads. In the mean time, I was creatively stifled. I can't stand not working and I had a lot of offers from New York City radio stations because I had done college radio in New York and was a shock jock, to be blunt. I had a lot of contacts in that industry and also had a lot of offers to go back into the public relations business where my heart was. I wanted to continue the career I had started and not go into radio or take advantage of these other

opportunities. My career was as a wrestling manager or co-host. I wasn't going to let someone, due to personal vendettas, destroy what I had worked hard for and what I wanted to do and what I felt I was qualified to do. But I couldn't make the jump to my other opportunity in the industry because I was being tied up in this legal red tape of my contract. I really did not want to go back to the territories because I would have probably been counter-sued, even if I tried, but I figured it was home in the Northeast, so why not do something in the Northeast. It was even recommended to me by someone within the WWF that I talk to Mario Savoldi because everybody up in the WWF seemed to like him and tolerate the ICW's existence because they never squashed it like a grape, like they very easily could have done on numerous occasions.

So I had a meeting with Mario Savoldi and his backer, Howard Rapp, and really just had the same concept I had with Sam DiCero. "Hey, you guys have been doing the same thing for a long time. Give me the ball, I know a lot of creative people and I might be able to hash some things out for you." And we did. We just came up with a new concept. I really took the approach of, "If Letterman redefined talk shows, I would like to redefine what a wrestling program is supposed to be about. On a very, very limited budget with piss-poor production facilities and capabilities, I tried to take advantage of the assets that we had and tried to limit our liabilities. The biggest asset we had was just the enthusiasm and the creativity of the people involved. So, therefore, we tried to utilize that and showcase that more than we did anything else. That was the most creatively stimulating opportunity I had up until that time.

Keller: What are you most proud of in your days with the ICW?

Dangerously: Four words. If you were to say to me, give me the greatest thing you were ever involved in with the ICW. Four words: The Wrestling School Drop-Out. He was a guy who reminded me of my favorite television character, Christopher Lloyd's character on Taxi. This guy was simple-minded, 130 pound schlemiel who didn't stand a snowball's chance in Chernoble of winning a wrestling match, but his desire to win a wrestling match, his roll-with-the-punches attitude, his, "O-

key-doke, let's do it again," came across so well. Tony Atlas was our champion, Dennis Condrey & Doug Gilbert were our tag team champions, we had Victor Steamboat who all the girls were absolutely nuts over, we had "Playboy" Vince Apollo who is very, very well-known in New England and very well received in the Boston area, we had the "Boston Badboy" Tony Rumble who can have the greatest letter of recommendation from me that anybody can ever have for any job in this business, and we had me. If you combine all of our fan mail, we didn't have half of the fan mail that this guy had. This guy was an absolute sensation. He was truly one of the most enjoyable things to watch in front of a camera that I have ever had the privilege of experiencing. This guy has more charisma in his pinky nail than most superstars in the entertainment world have in their whole body and entourage. He was just a natural for television and bloomed. He was introduced on his first hour as Jim Mulkey, the illegitimate Mulkey brother. He lost a match to S.D. Jones in about seven seconds because they made him take his glasses off and he couldn't see without his glasses. He reached around, found a human being, and snatched on a headlock and it turned out to be the referee. The referee shoved him off and S.D. caught him with a headbutt and one-two-three, it was over.

So we sent Tony Rumble into the dressing room to interview the guy. Rumble asked him, "Well, how tall are you?" He said, "About 5-4," which he was. "I weigh about 138." "Jim, nothing personal, you know, but I don't think you have what it takes to cut it here in the ICW." He said, "I wonder if it has anything to do with the fact that I dropped out of wrestling school." So we called him the Wrestling School Drop-Out. He was it. He was the key to our success there. He was so different and so unique and had an approach that had never been used before. We had shows where people got smacked with chairs, bled, carried out on stretchers, hit with phones, titles changed hands. This guy did an interview and nobody remembered the rest of the show. Anything that was that successful, you've got to be proud of.

Keller: *Could The Wrestling School Drop-Out go national?*

Dangerously: Oh yes. As a matter of fact, when I went back to WCW in 1990, they wanted him. At least a couple of the creative people wanted him. They said, "Geez, he's tremendous." He didn't want to

do it. Plus, the creative control turned over and that kind of concept would not be used. If Jamison can get fan mail in the WWF, this guy would make Luke Perry look like a flash in the pan.

CHAPTER 10

PAUL THE PERSON

Keller: *Who is the real Paul Heyman? Have we seen him on TV yet? Are you mean-spirited, back-stabbing, and money-hungry? Or are you a compassionate, caring, and soft-spoken person?*

Dangerously: What was the first option?

Keller: *Are you a mean, cheating, back-stabbing, and money-greedy person?*

Dangerously: Well if I was to that extent, I'd be a promoter wouldn't I.

Keller: *Or are you a compassionate, caring, soft-spoken, and laid-back person?*

Dangerously: If I was that, I would never have a contract. Obviously, when you are allotted 60 seconds of your week to convey your message to the audience, you're own view of the world that your audience lives in is going to be incorporated into how you deliver and what you deliver in those 60 seconds. I am not a great exponent of Hulk Hogan or Sting or anybody who has a tremendous fan-following going on television and throwing their political backing toward any candidate or saying whether they are pro-choice or anti-abortion or whatever. Along those same lines, if you in a way have a persona —and this is not just in wrestling—this goes for actors, baseball players who are outspoken—but if your persona is that of an outspoken individual, you're going to incorporate your own very personal ideas and feelings and emotions into your work. My work is a catharsis. I view myself as a creative human being. I view myself as one who has a lot of social views, a lot of very strong political feelings and my work is a catharsis for my frustrations with the world, so sure you will pick up a lot about me by different things that I say, as I said earlier in this interview about the guy who served overseas. That really hit me. And there are other issues that hit me, too. Like I said, I'm only allotted a certain time each week to convey my message and in that time I'm supposed to convince them it's worth it to buy a ticket to

come see us live. I'm supposed to convince them that I and those I represent are worth watching live and on TV. There's not a lot of time for small talk. There's only so much of me on television unless you want the 24 hour Paul E. Channel.

Keller: *What TV shows do you like? What are your hobbies besides reading a lot? Do you have any pets? What do your brothers and sisters do for a living?*

Dangerously: I have no brothers and sisters. I am an only child. It explains why I'm neurotic and why I'm always up until 6 in the morning looking to be entertained and I'm always afraid to fall asleep because I might miss something.

Keller: *Are you an only child because your parents saw you and decided they better stop at one?*

Dangerously: I tell you what, if I were my own father, which I understand is common practice in West Virginia, if I were my own father, I'd sure shut down production. Outside of wrestling, gee, it's funny, I'm such a career-driven person that I usually find myself catching up on my tapes, catching up on my reading of the industry through the various periodicals that report on what we do. I find myself going over my notes after I watch my tapes to critique others and myself, what I like and what I don't like about how I presented my views and everything else that is incorporated into our presentation that weekend. When I am removed from the business, it's a very simple life. New York is my life. I have a couple of friends, very select friends from high school who I'm still in touch with who still live in Scarsdale. We do the same things we did in high school, we race our cars and get in trouble. Sometimes I go up to Limerock which is in Connecticut and legally race cars there. That is fun. They have set up obstacle courses which is absolutely wonderful. I have a great time with that. That gets me in trouble sometimes. I utilize the nation's highways for getting to work as a way of practicing for a way of going back home and racing at Limerack which would explain my tremendous tax deductions for speeding tickets.

I hang out at the China Club in New York, because a lot of friends I have made in New York City from all walks of life—I mean, you name it, there is such a cross-section of humanity at the China Club—so I hang out there. There are other

places I hang out in New York City, but you have to be there on the right night in New York. I hang out with so many people that I have been fortunate enough to become friends with at the China Club. Besides that, I don't have a hell of a lot of time away anymore. I did as a commentator. I had time to explore hobbies. Now I don't. Off-time is rare. Therefore it is savoured for just the select things I get a chance to do now.

Keller: *We talked earlier about radio and talk shows. If you were to get into doing radio, how would Paul E. Dangerously have to change?*

Dangerously: I would think not at all. I mean, if you look at Paul E. Dangerously, he comes right after you. He's unabashed. He is practically uncensored. They don't do a lot of bleeping of me, because you don't really need to bleep me a lot in person unless there is a subject which I am just adamant about or extremely angry about, then they have had to bleep me in the past.

Keller: *If you were to be involved in radio, would you be as immersed into radio as you apparently are in wrestling? Could you immerse yourself into something else like you are into wrestling?*

Dangerously: Whether it is due to ego or the competitive nature of where I grew up, or whether it is just the pride that I take in my product and the product happens to be myself, I want to be the best at what I do. If I was a garbageman, I would want other garbagemen to say, "If I had garbage, I'd want him to pick it up. He's good. That guy's incredible." It's not just wrestling. Am I obsessed with being the best? Yes, I'd say so, but I'm proud of that obsession. But I can't be successful unless the company I work for is successful. I can't see how that can be a quality for a boss to look at and say, "Well, boy, all he wants to do is make himself great." People will say, "He did them a lot of good," if the company I work for goes down the drain.

My approach to radio was a lot different than people would assume it would be. It was pretty unique. It was a real innovative and unique approach. It would probably fall under the shock jock category because of that whole genre with Howard Stern leading the pack. But what a lot of people don't realize is that before Stern, there was Don Imus. In New York, this guy was huge. I mean, this guy was the king and is still on the air and is still drawing

phenomenal ratings and he is still number one or two behind Stern. And this guy is on AM radio. Stern is nothing more than an updated Imus. Make no mistake about it. Even he will admit, even though he hates Don Imus, how much he was influenced by the man. But I don't really consider what I did shock jock. I tried to take what had been done and go past that—post-modern. Something post-modern. It's been eight years and I still can't describe what I did.

Keller: *How long did you do radio?*

Dangerously: I was a college disk jockey for six months, but it wasn't constant employment because much like my tenure with World Championship Wrestling, I constantly found myself having to get my job back.

CHAPTER 11

WHAT ABOUT THE WWF?

Keller: *Does the idea of working for the WWF intrigue you?*

Dangerously: I'll give you one word that the WWF has that nobody else in the world has: Vince. There are a billion factors as to what made that machine go. He grew up under Vince McMahon Sr. That had to help. You're talking about a guy who really understood the nuances of this industry. He had the desire and the will and the balls to do it. He had Pat Patterson. He had that whole staff. He had all those people. He was the first wrestling promoter to bring people in from the outside. Princeton graduates were sending resumés saying, "I'd love to run your public relations department." "I'd love to run your arena booking department." "I'd love to run your syndicated television expansion department." Nobody had ever gone outside this industry before. But he did. And he brought himself some tremendously talented and innovative ingenious people. He had Hulk Hogan, but he also had Roddy Piper and Gene Okerlund and Jesse "The Body" Ventura. All of those components together made that machine go. Hey, it was Vince that did it and got it together. As somebody making a career in this industry, I have not had all that many opportunities to watch him off camera and see him and talk to or with him. Boy, I would say that that would have to be—and I would write that in big, black, and underlined, capitalized letters—just an



PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY AS PUBLIC RELATIONS DIRECTOR OF STUDIO 54, JUNE 1985
(Photo Courtesy Michael Crane)

educational experience.

Keller: *What about the potential role you would have in the WWF?*

Dangerously: Jim Ross and I had this conversation once in the car and we were both going over the pros and cons of working for World Championship Wrestling, working outside of wrestling, working for the World Wrestling Federation, starting another business. We were going over career alternatives in every aspect and the one thing at the time that was repeated more often than not is, "Everybody wants to work for the leader in the industry." I've always felt that no matter where I've worked, I was going to do my best to make that place the leader in the industry. I have never been in WCW and said, "We're going to kick their ass." I don't care if we do. I just hope that we become the leader. Sometimes that is feasible. Many times that has not been. The idea of working for the leader in the industry does not intrigue me because if I'm working for number two, I'm working at getting them to number one. That's my job, to make it the most successful. What does intrigue me about working there? I don't know. I've never worked there.

Keller: *What about their use of managers? You could make a case that Jimmy Hart has been*

vastly underutilized and even Harvey Whippleman's role is so structured? Or do you see Heenan's role possibly becoming yours and if so, does that intrigue you?

Dangerously: Well, name a person in WWF history on his side of the fence that is more famous than Bobby Heenan. I mean, he is a star, He is a fixture. It would be hard to picture the WWF without Bobby Heenan. As I said before and as I've been reminded many times in my career, timing is everything. The right person in the wrong place is not going to make a lot of money. The wrong person in the right place is going to make a lot of money, but for how long? You gotta be the right person in the right place at the right time?



LAWRENCE "L.T." TAYLOR THREATENS PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY AS JIM ROSS INTERVENES ON "PRO WRESTLING NEW YORK" (Photo Courtesy Associated Press)

Keller: When you look at the WWF and see how Jimmy Hart and Downtown Bruno and others have been used, given those circumstances, given your apparent pride in your talent, if you were to go to the WWF, you would likely want assurance that you would be given a chance to fulfill your potential. And is it true that you were once given hints of that assurance from the WWF about a year ago, possibly even being Bobby Heenan's heir?

Dangerously: I think everybody is given the assurance that you will be used to the fullest extent of your capabilities when you go there, because from what I see, and this is what any form of sports or entertainment or sports-entertainment is about, you exploit the personality for everything he's worth. You milk the cow for every drop of milk. The Giants are not going to keep Lawrence Taylor an extra year just

because he's L.T. When it was time for Willy Mayes to retire, he wasn't given much of a choice. When it's time, it's time. Jimmy Hart was a tremendous talent in Memphis and was needed there in a different capacity than he was in the World Wrestling Federation. I don't truly believe that they purposely hold a lot of people back. I've seen them take some individuals that quite frankly did not have a future in this industry and Titan Sports made a hell of a lot of money off of that personality and that personality made a living in a business where a lot of people said, "You're not going to make it, kid." They exploit your assets, they don't dwell on our liabilities.

In response to your question about any assurances I was offered, the person I was dealing with at the time in March 1991 gave me the assurance that I would be allowed to go as far as I could climb. "I'm sure (and I've heard this speech from a million other people) you could make as much money as Hulk Hogan. I'm not promising you that much money, but you will have the opportunity to carry the ball as far down the field as you can." I wasn't given that speech. I was told, "You're gonna go as far as you can take yourself because you are going to be handed the ball and let's see how far you can run." I was not fully aware of the circumstances of the offer. I had hints. I knew that Bobby Heenan wanted to concentrate on commentary. I did not realize at the time I was being offered the position as Bobby Heenan's heir. I knew it had been discussed. It had been discussed with me both half-jokingly and very seriously by certain people, but I did not realize the enormity of the offer until I had decided to stay as a commentator. Because at the time when I was offered the job, I was a commentator in World Championship Wrestling and was under the assumption that the rest of my career would be as a commentator. You don't see Jesse Ventura going back into wrestling or going back on the road as a manager. I didn't think I would either. So the job as a manager was, to me, "I'm a commentator now, guys. Why would I want a job as a manager?" In retrospect, boy, I should have taken the job. Because he is, despite anyone's feelings toward myself or Jim Cornette or Sensational Sherri or whomever else is always dubbed the best manager in the business, Bobby Heenan set the standard. He is the Johnny Carson of managers and I was offered to be Jay Leno to his Johnny

Carson. There are some nights when I sit back and say, "That was the greatest mistake I ever made in my career." But in the same aspect, look at all the animosity Jay Leno has now because he was anointed king of the talk show hosts. He was handed the scepter, the torch was passed, and he was anointed by Johnny the new king. And in a way, though, it may have been the greatest mistake, but maybe it was also a great blessing not taking taking the job because in five years if I am dubbed by consensus king of managers or the best manager, it is because I earned it, I didn't inherit it. I worked, and I strived, and I succeeded on my own. So my greatest mistake could turn out to be my greatest blessing.

Keller: Is that still possible?

Dangerously: Bobby Heenan is not a manager anymore. And the situation then is different than it is today. There are a lot of things involved which I don't feel comfortable talking about because it would be a breach of ethics to those people who I dealt with within that company and a lot of the discussions that I had were off-the-record. But suffice to say, it was the most unique opportunity at a time when the greatest manager in the history of our industry was ready to pursue a different avenue and was handing over the reigns of the Heenan family. A 25 year old from Scarsdale, New York was offered the opportunity to hang onto those reigns and that kid thought his future was in commentary and didn't take it.

CHAPTER 12

DANGEROUS COLOR COMMENTARY

Keller: In doing your commentary full-time, what was more fulfilling about commentating than managing? And more fulfilling about managing than commentating?

Dangerously: As CEO of the "Dangerous Alliance," one of my major functions is to be the spokesman for those who employ me as their manager. One of my assets or what I have been complimented on by my peers and what I have received the least criticism on by the critics is that I am a good talker. I can get the point across. A good interview to me, because that's what I do, is as fulfilling for me as a good match for a wrestler would be.

(When I have) a good interview, I got my point across, I explained our viewpoint articulately to those who have intelligence, and explained our viewpoint simplistically enough for those who are not as fortunate to be on the intellectual par with some of our cultural elite. To be afforded the opportunity to do nothing but spend 60 or 120 minutes explaining what's going on is like affording a wrestler the opportunity to wrestle on the whole show. "Welcome to Clash of the Champions XXXXII. We now present to you, 'Ravishing' Rick Rude vs. 'Nature Boy' Ric Flair, nothing else, just that." Those guy are going to be happy because they get to showcase their talents for the entire program. Being a commentator and a co-host, I'm applying my trade for the whole show.

What do I miss as a manager? I miss being the guy the commentators are talking about. I would sit back as an announcer and say, "The reason the guy did this was this." But in the back of my mind, I'm thinking I would love to do that one more time or I would love to crack that guy across the head with the telephone. I miss the interaction with the audience. That was why as an announcer I got the best of both worlds, because I got to do "Danger Zones" live and interact with the people live. The Danger Zone was a talk show moderated by me, so my message was as important as the guy I was interviewing. I had the best of both worlds. I did miss being a manager, though. You miss being part of the action. I learned so much as a commentator. I could have never handled the "Dangerous Alliance" without having been a commentator first. No way. No way would I have been ready, not even if I had managed for ten more years would I have been ready if I weren't co-host of those three shows for fourteen months.

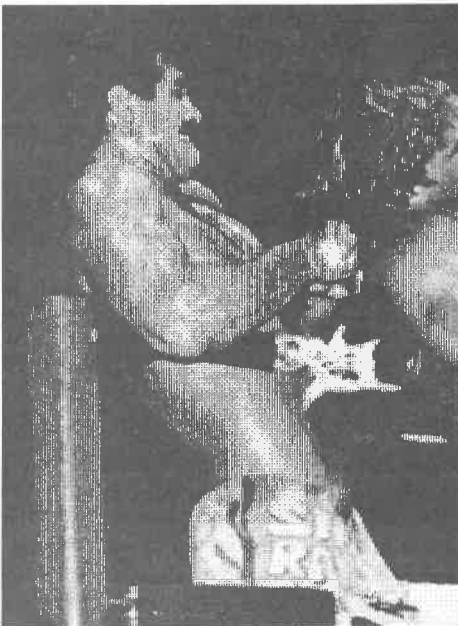
CHAPTER 13

THE "DANGEROUS ALLIANCE"

Keller: Talk about the "Dangerous Alliance," which consists of the best wrestler in the world in many aspects in Rick Rude, the best prospect in Steve Austin, one of the best talkers in Larry Zbyszko, and two captains of two of the best tag teams ever, Arn Anderson and Bobby Eaton?

Dangerously: Whew! It is the greatest

array of talent I have ever seen presented together as a unit in this or any other form of sports entertainment. To be honest with you, the (NBA) "Dream Team" could kiss our ass. Because Bird and Johnson could not mesh as well as Anderson and Eaton. And everybody thought Magic and Michael on the same team did not mean as much as grooming Steve Austin to be the franchise player, Rick Rude standing out above everybody else in the entire industry, and Larry Zbyszko who I have known since I was 13 years old, finally for the first time since the deal with Sammartino, and I'm not including his days in the AWA, being on national TV in a position where each and every week people are seeing just what Larry is capable of. Oh, was it the ultimate collection. When we came up with the concept of it, there were so many different people that were considered, so many prospective members, and if I could turn the clock back and start the "Dangerous Alliance" from day one all over again, I would not change one single solitary



RICK RUDE (Photo by Wade Keller)

acquisition no matter who you would offer me as a trade. The mesh, the chemistry, the people involved, everything was there. It had all the components of the perfect presentation. It had everything that the machine needed to operate.

Keller: What were the highlights from the first six months?

Dangerously: The first six months was one big orgasmic experience, to be honest

with you. After being suspended and coming back only 20 days later at Halloween Havoc and getting to vent some very deep-seeded frustrations with a live interview and knowing that people whose bleeding guts I hated were in back going, "Oh my God, we have him on live satellite and there's nothing we can do about it." Just their fear energized me. When Rick Rude pinned Sting for the United States Heavyweight Championship. The night that we all came out together and we introduced the "Dangerous Alliance." That whole interview was for me personally a culmination of many, many things over many, many years because, number one, the fact that I was entrusted, especially by Rude, to introduce everybody and it was always our main objective to keep Rude head and shoulders above the rest of the pack. We all agreed that that was something that injured Flair's mystique in the Horsemen in that he was one of four and that everybody bar-none agreed that Rude needed to remain head-and-shoulders above the rest. For Rick, who's very, very serious about his career, to entrust me to do that, to put the faith in a manager to keep it on the right track was very, very flattering because we had not known each other very long.

Larry Zbyszko I've known since I was 13 years old. I managed him once when he was AWA Heavyweight Champion on an independent event for Joel Goodhart in Philadelphia against David Sammartino with Bruno Sammartino in his corner. But Larry and I had joked for years about he and I being together. Larry was one of the people that when I was a teenager prodded me about going in front of the camera. Here I was, 13 years later right there saying, "Ladies and gentleman, my new protégé, Larry Zbyszko."

"Stunning" Steve Austin is the next franchise wrestler in this industry. Make no mistake about it, he is, and nobody but nobody can take that away from him. And to realize, wow, I'm now part of the future of this business makes you sit there and think, "Wow, I've got longevity." It's good job security when you are going to be a major part of the next decade of this business and Steve Austin is going to be a major part of the next decade. As for Arn Anderson and Bobby Eaton, I always felt that would be the greatest tag team in the business because I admired Arn and Tully together, and I of course admired Bobby &



ARN ANDERSON & PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY
(Photo by Wade Keller)

Dennis and Bobby & Stan. I always liked Bobby and Dennis together the most, I was very partial toward that team because I know Dennis so well. But to embrace Bobby Eaton on TV after we had the Midnight-Midnight feud was a very strange feeling for me because this was Bobby Eaton of Jim Cornette's Midnight Express. It really was a whole new era for us to be embracing.

As for Arn Anderson, I have never admired anybody as much as I have admired Arn Anderson in this business. I think he is the consummate wrestler. If there was a wrestler Hall of Fame, he should be one of the first inductees. I have always sought out his advice and would never, ever, ever have gone through with the mixed tag team matches involving myself and Missy Hyatt over the summer if Arn Anderson was not my partner. For him to be willing to do that was so flattering. When I was afforded the opportunity to become Arn Anderson's manager, I was so flattered, I was so high naturally that it was euphoria. I very rarely have a drink, I don't do drugs, and you could have shot me up with anything you want, I couldn't have been on a higher cloud. When we won the World Tag Team Titles, when Arn Anderson hit Dustin Rhodes with that telephone and I heard the track of the phone and I heard the one-two-three and the "new World Tag Team Champions," that was a tremendous thrill.

I think the circumstances at

SuperBrawl II were a very big highlight in the first six months of the "Dangerous Alliance" involving the Ninja. I think it all led up to WrestleWar when we were on the cover of the magazine, we were on the poster, and we were on a t-shirt all together, the "Dangerous Alliance." I had never been on a t-shirt before, I didn't allow it. For this, of course, all the permission slips had to come out and the lawyers got together again and I signed the merchandising agreement because I was very happy to be on that shirt. Every night working with the people involved in the "Dangerous Alliance" was a highlight in the first six months.

Another highlight for me was co-hosting the last Saturday show under Kip Frey. Co-hosting Saturday night on TBS is something I wanted desperately to do. Also, what I considered my finest presentation, Arn Anderson vs. Barry Windham, because it not only presented the final episode of the Four Horsemen, but also represented a new era in the "Dangerous Alliance" in that Arn and I really clicked that night and it to me is my favorite managerial performances ever and it's one of Arn's favorite matches. Barry is the one we most coveted to replace Zbyszko. Those two moments were the most absolute highlights for the D.A., not just personally for me, but it meant a lot for Arn, too.

Keller: What have you learned from working with the D.A.?

Dangerously: There are different things to learn from each person. Arn Anderson is one of the most articulate speakers of our era in this business and can get 20 points across in five sentences. Oh boy, do you learn how to do an interview when you sit next to Arn Anderson. Boy, do you learn to divert the referee's attention during a tag team match while working with Bobby Eaton. My God, do you learn to deal with the fear of everybody in the crowd wanting to beat the crap out of you when you stand in the middle of the ring when Rick Rude takes off his robe. There was one night when there were 5000 fans in Kansas City and I felt 10,000 eyes glaring at us desperately wanting to utilize their 50,000 fingers and rip us limb from limb and to chop up what was left into itty-bitty pieces so it can never be put together again. Larry is one of those people who took the torch from a previous generation. He grew up with the Sammartinos and the Strongbows

and the Gino Britos and the Tony Parises and the Gorilla Monsoons and the Spiros Arions and the Killer Kowalskis and incorporated their way into the 1990s way. You learn old-school while doing new-school with Larry. He was a real treat as well. As for Steve Austin, now you're dealing with someone who is strictly born into the new school, has the utmost respect and desire to learn from the old school, and understands we have to be the one to carry the torch to the next school. You learn from everyone something different.

Keller: What is it about Steve Austin that made everybody say he stood out from day one?

Dangerously: Just the way he carried himself.

Keller: From watching him or knowing him behind the scenes?

Dangerously: Steve Austin is the type of guy who when he enters the dressing room doesn't have to say a word, everybody knows he has walked in. He has it. Big, capital, bold letters. What separated "Nature Boy" Buddy Rogers from "Handsome Johnny Barons?" What separated Antonio Rocca from Miguel Perez, what separated Bruno Sammartino from Dominic DeNucci. What separated Bob Backlund from Brad Rheingans. Somebody had IT, other people don't or other people don't have as much of IT. Whether it be charisma or presence, what ever IT is, Steve Austin has an abundance of it.

Keller: Is IT natural talent or is IT being a sponge for knowledge in the case of Steve Austin?

Dangerously: It is the same as what made the WWF set on fire in 1985: Having everything come together at once. And he knows how to implement everything.

CHAPTER 14

BILL WATTS

Keller: So far, what have you learned from being under Bill Watts's leadership?

Dangerously: I haven't been around him long enough to learn from him. I don't get to see him that often. I've seen more of Bill Watts on television than I have in person and I think we've had maybe five minutes of one-to-one conversation thus far. I really haven't been afforded the

opportunity to learn from him as of this interview.

Keller: *Have you learned from watching what he has done thus far as the leader of WCW?*

Dangerously: When I was working with Eddie Gilbert, I was like a little kid. "Why, why why, why, why? Why did you say this? Why did you say this? Why did you put this on second in stead of third and therefore why not first?" and he answered. I used to drive Jim Ross up the wall when we were announcers because I asked him so many questions about announcing. I need to ask questions in order to really learn.

Keller: *What do you think of the way Bill Watts has responded to you as a manager? Does he believe you are talented and want to exploit those talents?*

Dangerously: You'd have to ask Bill Watts that. I can't see through his eyes and I don't know his long-range plans and I don't know where he sees World Championship Wrestling in five years. I'm 26 years old. I don't want to be nor am I in a position to retire when I'm 28. This is not a job for me, this is not something I'm doing today. This is not something that just pays the bills. This is my career. This is what I have chosen as my profession. This is my occupation. I just hope that anybody I work for understands that I look at this with hopes of tremendous longevity because I'm a young guy and I want to be around for a long time.

Keller: *What do you think of what Bill Watts has brought to WCW thus far, both the pluses and minuses?*

Dangerously: I work for Bill Watts. He is the boss right now. There are pluses and they are glaring; you can see them on TV every week. And there are minuses and I know them in my heart. To speak out publicly on minuses is bias because I haven't had the chance to sit down and say, "Hey, what about this, Cowboy Bill?" Maybe it is just my personal feelings because of how it has affected me. It's like asking Bobby Eaton, "Hey, what do you think of that top rope rule, Bobby?" He's gonna mumble something awful nasty because it affected his finishing maneuver. I'm sure he's going to have a different view of it than Big Van Vader. Any pluses that I tell you are going to sound like bullshit because people are going to read it and go, "Awe, he just says that because he works for him." I've read all too many times when

you interview people in the company when George Scott was in charge, what a creative genius George Scott was, or when someone else who was very difficult to get along with was in charge, other people would say, "Oh, he's the easiest guy in the world." Then everybody who reads that and knows the real story says, "God, is he full of shit." If I'm telling you the truth about the pluses, people are still going to say he's saying that because he works for them. If I tell you the pluses even if they're true, it won't have as much credibility as someone who doesn't work for him and works on the outside. So I don't want to give you bullshit or give you bias.

Keller: *Ignoring that Bill Watts was his replacement, would you have liked to have seen Kip Frey given more time to implement his ideas? And what would those ideas have been?*

Dangerously: He was different. He was most different. He wasn't afraid to admit that he didn't know anything about the industry when he came in. Those were the first words out of his mouth: "I don't know anything about this, but boy it looks great to me. It looks like it can turn a profit." He had incredible enthusiasm. He seemed to genuinely like wrestling. Kip's a businessman. Kip has been in the entertainment industry a long time. Much like someone who has produced Monday Night Football and remembered right before halftime to get a real tight shot of the cute cheerleader whose skirt is just a little bit too high, I'm sure there were things he wanted to bring that were not thought of generally by wrestling people. Just like putting an MTV producer on Monday Night Football would have a shot of that cheerleader, or when Joe Theisman's leg got completely broken in half, they remembered to get a close-up of some kid wearing a Theisman t-shirt crying. No (deep, staccato voice) "I AM FOOTBALL" producer would even think of that. He would have a close-up of Howard Cosell going, "You have just witnessed one of the most debilitating injuries in sports." And the new guy, who doesn't only think football, he thinks TV, he thinks imagery and is going to go for another shot. Kip brought an outsiders' view to wrestling.

Let's be fair. If we draw just wrestling fans, we're cheating ourselves out of a large section of demographics of non-wrestling fans who might be turned on to our product if we're doing things that are not just

wrestling, but entertaining the people who don't even like wrestling. That's what Vince did in 1985. I'm not saying we should go show the Barbarian on a cook-out after he kills the white bengal tiger and I'm not saying we should have "Cooking with Missy." What I am saying is sometimes we need a non-wrestling perspective to see how the other half live.

Keller: *What is the key for WCW to grow?*

Dangerously: We need to have a product, we need to define the product, we need to market the product, we need to cultivate the audience, and no matter how many sell-outs or record-smashing ratings we achieve, we need to constantly seek out new members to our audience and constantly, every day, invite more people to come on just to give us a try. It's like that old commercial for the cigar, for White Owl Cigars, "We're gonna getcha'. Ohhhh, we're gonna getcha'." We've got to get them.

Keller: *Is it more important to bring in Ric Flair, Jim Cornette, Bret Hart, Ted DiBiase, and Sid Justice or is it more important what you do with the talent you have?*

Dangerously: What does Hulk Hogan mean if he wrestles in the opening match against Randy Mulkey every night? Nothing. And he will consistently mean nothing unless he moves up the card and is presented as no longer, "That's the guy that just demolished Randy Mulkey in the opening match." He needs to be presented as the guy who is now in the main event. Just having the people that can do it doesn't mean as much as affording them the opportunity to do it. But you can afford Joe Blow the opportunity to do it, and if he can't carry the ball, you're not gonna' go anywhere. Bobby Eaton's the greatest guy in the world, but I wouldn't want him as the color commentator. That's the right person in the wrong position.

Keller: *What have you thought of the scandals involving Titan Sports and the World Wrestling Federation and the media's coverage?*

Dangerously: I think the problem is too many people wanted to touch it... I don't think that this scandal in any way, shape, or form can be viewed as healthy for the industry. But I think that the reports of wrestling's death, to paraphrase Mark Twain, have been greatly exaggerated.

Keller: *Was there any time during the*

reporting of the stories where you felt, being in the wrestling business and thus generalized by the non-fan as part of the scandals, that the media crossed the line and over-reported or exploited the business?

Dangerously: I live in New York where the media by its very nature is based on exploitation... I don't know if the media's been fair, but news in itself has to be exploitive. It is exploitation of the events that are going on around the world. In defense of the people who report the news, it's their job to exploit. If the public is so turned off by gross exploitation, then the ratings die and we will see reruns of Married with Children rather than the 10 o'clock news. It is always good for an industry to have a watch dog society and if there is corruption at any level at any section of this or any other industry or form of entertainment or sports or TV or politics, etcetera, it is always healthy for that corruption to be exposed. I don't know if any of the allegations are true, therefore I don't want to sit here and say that what happened there hurt the business because I don't know what really happened there. I can make a blatant statement that it never hurts an industry to have its own safeguards and a watchdog society watching over it. It helps keep corruption out of an industry, not just wrestling, but boxing, football, baseball, to the U.S. Postal System.

CHAPTER 15

THE INDEPENDENT WRESTLING SCENE

Keller: What do you think of the independent wrestling scene? Can it be successful?

Dangerously: Sure.

Keller: What will it take for it to survive?

Dangerously: Buy low, sell high (laughs). Take in more money than you spend. Everybody's sitting there going, "Oh, sure Paul E. it's easier said than done."

Keller: But I don't think many people realize how profound that sounds to a lot of independent promoters?

Dangerously: Ooooh. I've been involved in independents. I've made a lot of money with independents. I know how

successful they can be. I've been involved with some who had a \$22,000 gate and the guy lost four grand. My dad taught me a long time ago if one guy craps on your lawn, it's an insult. If 100 guys crap on your lawn, you're in the fertilizer business. So what does it take to be a successful promotion? Here comes the prophetic words of the holy messiah of the wrestling business, Paul E. Dangerously: Buy low, sell high. Supply and demand. Take in more money than you dole out. Boy, oh boy, there's your formula kids. Take that formula and run. Go and run with it, become a successful wrestling promoter. Don't buy the Dale Carnegie books, you read it all. Those three sentences, you follow those and you could be the next Vince McMahon or Bill Watts or Baba or Otto Wanz.

Keller: Is it possible in this era with the sophistication of entertainment to promote a successful minor league, small time wrestling promotion and succeed or is that part of the past?

Dangerously: P.T. Barnum made a hell of a lot of money in his day, but he had to update it. Now he goes to Madison Square Garden and Boston Garden and the L.A. Forum and they come into town once or twice a year with six weeks of promotion with more than one attraction and they sell 45 different picture books and 62 page color fold-out programs and the cotton candy comes with an autograph photo of the two-headed bearded lady, but also on the back of that is an advertisement for her 900 number, and if you call that number you have option A, which is talk to her live, or B, talk to her bisexual midget cousin who will be on "All My Children" next week. Every industry has to keep up with the times. WCW and the WWF are national television promotions with big money behind them and they utilize the vast promotional benefits of their "machine" to entice people to pay to see the product. A group with less money is going to have to appeal to people in a different way, be it with quality wrestling or local interest by involving the weather man as the special referee, or just have local champions battle it out. I don't know, but I do know that any form of entertainment, sports, movies, concerts, have to have a catch to it nowadays. Just like there was a catch to it back then.

Keller: What do you think of Jim Cornette's efforts with Smoky Mountain Wrestling?

Dangerously: He has a massive undertaking ahead of him. It's what I said before, being at the right place at the right time with the right people under the right circumstances, and even then there are so many factors that can work against you.

Keller: What do you think of a national league group working with a regional group? Is it a good idea?

Dangerously: Jim Crockett once said to me, "Every single thing you do in this business has its upside and its downside and the way to decide which to do is to see which is heavier, its upside of its downside. It is good in terms of developing young talent? Whew! We better find a place to do that, guys. Wake up and smell the coffee. Is it good in terms of it helping out the local promotion? It is a capitalistic business. Do I really give a damn if the local promoter in Halifax, Nova Scotia draws? Not really, because I work for World Championship Wrestling and I'm worried about what we are drawing and our TV ratings. The future stars have to come from somewhere. Look at Chris Benoit. He is one of the most talented athletes in this or any other sport and he's had to apply his trade in Japan for the past two years because there's nowhere here where he can make a living doing his thing on a full-time basis. Everything has its upside and its downside. Is it necessary for the survival of the big leagues? I think we can draw a house in Hawaii without the benefit of Hawaii Championship Wrestling backing us up, but for how many years will we be able to do these tours if we don't have a fresh influx of athletes? They have to come from somewhere... I don't think it would be in the best interests of any national promotion to use its vast power to squash a regional promotion. I would encourage the survival of the regional promotions. I am not advocating funding them, I am not advocating subcontracting our talent to help them, but don't hinder them.

Keller: Thanks for your time and for walking us through your career in such detail. I appreciate it, as will the readers.

Dangerously: Thanks for everything. I've really enjoyed the interview.

BECOMING A MANAGER...

It Ain't Easy, Says Torch's Japan Columnist... First-Hand

By Chis Zavis, Torch Columnist

What would you do if you were a serious fan of film and the opportunity presented itself for you to have a major role in a Hollywood motion picture? I mean you are a *big time fan*, the type who has a room filled with videotapes, books, magazines, posters, and other assorted paraphernalia. I am talking about a fan who thinks they know enough about their addiction to delude themselves into believing they are a critic. Would you jump at the opportunity to see how the magic is really made, or would you stay safely at home with your tapes and books?

Most people never get the opportunity to answer the question. Regardless of it being a motion picture, dancing in the Bolshoi ballet, or trying to stop a Wayne Gretzky slapshot, for almost all of us these are only idle fantasies that never come close to reality. But recently, for me, the dream did indeed come true.

Since you are now reading this in the *Torch Annual*, chances are excellent that you are a serious wrestling fan. You collect tapes, programs, and magazines. You subscribe to a variety of wrestling publications, watch several weekly wrestling TV shows with dogged loyalty, and probably have a monthly cable bill that resembles most people's monthly car payments. In short, you are a hardcore wrestling fan who cannot get enough.

When Dave Meltzer printed in the *Wrestling Observer Newsletter* that I was working as a wrestling manager, several friends wrote or called to find out more. All expressed the desire to have it happen to them. When Wade told me the Summer Annual would have a special section concerning managers, it seemed like writing down my experiences would be the obvious thing to do. I suspect, to some

small extent, my momentary ride on the merry-go-round is also yours. After all, when the Beatles sang about the Walrus (or was it the Eggman?) they proclaimed "I am he and you are he and you are me and we all are together." With that thought firmly planted in our craniums, here is my tale of how I went from a hardcore fan to a wrestling manager. I hope some of you get a slight vicarious thrill or two from it. Dreams can come true—they can happen to you. Well, at least one happened for me.

THE BEGINNING: TV ANNOUNCING

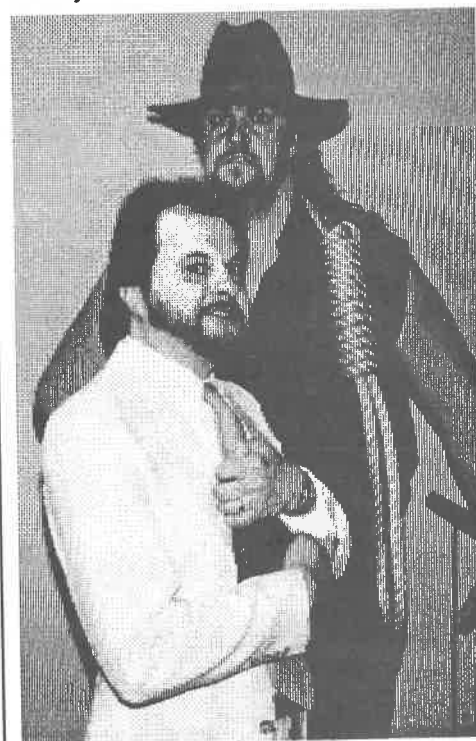
Over a year ago, I began trading wrestling tapes with a local wrestler named Mike Kelly. Mike is a fairly big guy, about 6-2, 250 lbs. Like any good son of the Emerald Isle, he sports a shock of reddish brown hair that covers his head and face giving him the look of a big, friendly Irish bear. He is a friendly and polite man who just happens to be a professional wrestler. When Mike wanted to produce a cable access TV show featuring wrestling, he asked me to join him. We took a two-night class and received a cheap certificate which pronounced us TV producers. Mike and I eventually put together about a dozen 30 minute shows which usually presents action from the Ohio-based Independent Championship Wrestling circuit for whom Mike wrestled. We also threw in an occasional Japanese match and did several news segments with me as the anchorman.

Sometimes we did our commentary right over the Spanish or Japanese that was already there. "You at home may be hearing the voices" Yeah, right. The highpoint came when we showed the Atushi Onita vs. Tarzan Goto exploding barbed wire cage match and I cautioned young fans, "Do not try this at home."

Mike looked aghast and said that not many viewers had the Onita cage set up in their backyard, but they could always improvise with chicken wire and flares.

A few shows later, the lowpoint came when I, as the color commentary, complimented some obscure local wrestler on his abilities and added, "He certainly has been working on his tan." Without batting an eyelash, Mike chimed in, "Well, Chris, that's because he's a black man." If Gilda Radner were alive, she would have timidly covered it with, "Oh, never mind."

I guess Mike was suitably impressed with my insightful comments and as a result in early April he asked my advise about wrestling. ICW had the same problem that most smaller promotions usually have—the lack of a killer heel. But



GIDEON WAINWRIGHT (CHRIS ZAVIS)
& JUDGE DREAD (Photo Courtesy ICW)

Mike said they were trying to create something around their largest wrestler, a man who stood over 6-7 and weighed over 350 lbs. The problem was he lacked color and did not have a strong interview.

Mike and his booker, Al Snow, team as The Wild Bunch. They also teamed to create Judge Dread. The idea was basically the old western hanging judge in black who carries a noose and Bible. They needed a manager who could do his talking for him and flesh out the gimmick by drawing heat from the crowd. Mike suggested a Bible-spouting lawyer who was modeled

on the Gregory Peck character from the "Cape Fear" remake. We kicked it around a bit, and I suggested the lawyer be Judge Dread's personal prosecutor. At the start of each match, he would accuse the opponent of various crimes. The Judge would pronounce him "guilty" and then squash him like a bug. To accent the size of Dread, the Prosecutor should be fairly small, but be able to use words like a rapper.

A few days later Mike called back saying that Al Snow loved the idea and added that they both wanted me to be the Prosecutor. As appealing as that sounded, I had to back off since it would require just about every weekend and all the bookings were over two hours away in Ohio. With my job, family, and other interests, I just could not justify that type of commitment. They hired someone else, tried him out at a spot show, and pronounced it a total bomb. They offered it to me again with the proviso that it would require no more than two weekends a month. This sounded too good to pass up. I accepted their second offer.

I was told I would make my debut on April 17, 1992 at the ICW's main venue in Lima, Ohio.

COMING UP WITH A NAME

Anyone who has ever written a work of fiction will tell you that character names are extremely important. The right sounding name can imply all sorts of character traits that can add to or subtract from your character. The right name can add personality, pizzazz, and sparkle. Would Harrison Ford's adventuring alter ego be the same if he was called Ignatz Vidarski? What if Joe Montana had been born as Hugo Schmedlap? What about if Magic Johnson had been saddled with Hermie Glimp? Their abilities would certainly be the same, but the name does help get the "character" over. Even if the "character" is actually a real person.

I came up with the name Gideon Wainwright using several sources of inspiration. The old Marx Brothers films had Groucho with a long list of wonderful names—Rufus T. Firefly, Otis B. Driftwood, Dr. Hugo Z. Hackenbush, and many others. The old Amos & Andy TV show featured a smarmy, unprincipled attorney who stole every scene he was in. His name, Algonquin J. Calhoun. I wanted a name in that tradition. Since the character would have a tinge of preacher to him, the name should also have a Biblical sound to it.

A variety of names came and went, but the magical one had yet to make its

appearance. At the time, I was teaching a lesson at school about the Bill of Rights to my government class. We were discussing the right to an attorney and on the chalkboard I had written the Supreme Court case which is the landmark decision in this area—"Gideon v. Wainwright." Sometimes what you are searching for is right there under your nose. If I may paraphrase the aforementioned legal scholar Algonquin J. Calhoun—"There it was and there I is."

Once I had the name, then came the question of style. The managers that I most admire are Jim Cornette, Jimmy Hart, and Bobby Heenan. I hoped to borrow a little bit from all three. Heenan has always projected a glorious aura of total superiority to everyone around him. His trademark phrases referring to the fans as "humanoids, nine-too-fivers, and ham and egggers" are uttered with the confidence of one who totally knows he is indeed on a higher plane. At work, I once had a fellow teacher tell me that I walked around the building with a swagger that implied I owned the place. I liked that and tried to borrow from Heenan and build on it.

Jimmy Hart's Memphis stint was truly inspired madness. Hart was like an impish demon from the Green Room of Hell who would do anything to get under the skin of Jerry Lawler and Company. He would stop at nothing, no matter how off the wall or absurd. I wanted to use some of that craziness.

Then there is the man considered by many to be the penultimate professional wrestling manager—Jim Cornette. Jim is the wittiest, funniest, and cleverest manager of all time. When he does arena mic work, it is often better than the action in most matches. His antics outside the ring are perfectly timed to rise and fall with the action within the ring. He is a master at working the crowd, knowing just how to pull their strings and obtain the desired response. Mr. Cornette would be my shining example and the goal to aim at.

During the entire time all this planning was professing, I repeatedly consulted with my good friend, John Muse. John is a fellow Detroit area resident who at the age of only 22 years old knows more about the wrestling business than many people who have followed it longer than he has been alive. Many of you may recognize his name from his column in *Three Count* or his published letters in the *Torch* and *Observer*. John makes no secret that someday, somehow, someday, he would like to be a

booker. For the last several years he has practiced by laying out elaborate scenarios for Titan and WCW leading up to their major events. Almost always his booking is vastly better than the real thing. He has even sent reams of paper to Titan, received polite letters of release in return, and has seen some of his ideas utilized on Titan TV. His taste in wrestling is very close to my own and I value his judgement and opinion. John helped me with a few details in building the Wainwright character and expressed a strong desire to improve other ICW characters as well. He contacted Mike Kelly and was invited down to Lima. We were on our way.

Let's take you on the adventure of the first eight weeks of Mr. Wainwright's activities...

WAINWRIGHT'S DEBUT

On Apr. 17, I make my managerial debut in Lima, Ohio at the Civic Center. It is my first time in a wrestling locker room as anything more than a visitor and it is a real thrill meeting everybody for the first time and being accepted as part of the show. Booker Al Snow tells me that I am scheduled to introduce Judge Dread to the crowd and that we would not be part of any actual match. They simply want to introduce the Wainwright and Dread characters and hopefully get them over as heels.

I go out after the second match wearing a light plaid suit at least 15 years out of date, carrying a brown leather briefcase, wearing reading glasses perched on the end of my nose. They introduce me over the P.A. system and the boos start long before I get to the ring. When I finally climb in, it is the first time in my life I actually stood in a wrestling ring. It feels good. I place the briefcase down and arrogantly size up the crowd and utter my first words as a pro.

"That's a pretty rude reception for folks who call yourselves human beings. 'Course, here in Lima, maybe I should call you folks Lima beings."

This whole thing is done with a Southern drawl so the word "being" comes out softly as "beans." The negative response increases and does not stop until five minutes later when I had finally left. The crowd hates me and I love it.

The basic concept behind Judge Dread is his pronouncement of "guilty" on his opponent. Since Dread has no opponent this night, I selected members of the crowd who look particularly sinful. I accused one

overweight woman of gluttony and alleged she had "closed more all-you-can-eat-buffet bars than Roseanne Barr and that fat husband or hers." A bearded trucker-type is accused of "frequenting that nudie bar and massage parlor up on I-75." A well endowed, lovely young lady is accused of "trying to seduce good family men with brightly painted lips, dark circles about the eyes, and tight clothing which accent your female protuberances." All of this goes surprisingly well and I actually believe some of them enjoyed being selected. When I finish with the sexy seductress, many people stood challenging me to pick them. Like Jimmy Durante used to say, "Everybody wants to get into the act."

INTRODUCING JUDGE DREAD

I then bring out Judge Dread. "To pass judgement on these allegations requires a giant of a man. He must be a physical giant, a moral giant, and a spiritual giant. Ladies and gentlemen.... I give you The Purveyor of Punishment... the right hand of Righteousness... the Jewel of Judgement... and The Gavel of God. Ladies and Gentlemen, I give (poignant pause, drop to one knee, and extend right arm to entrance area)... Judge Dread!"

The Judge enters to a wailing harmonica piece from Sergio Leone's cowboy tale "Once Upon a Time in the West." He stands nearly 6-8 and 350 lbs. From head to toe he is dressed in all black. A black hat covers his head and he carries a Bible in one hand and a hangman's noose in the other. The Judge slowly walks to the ring, then makes a slow circuit around it. The whole time he casts an evil gaze over the crowd. In the ring, I shadow his progress and make motions to the crowd to show proper respect and rise as the Judge approaches. Of course, nobody rises other than those who are screaming insults. After Dread climbs into the ring, I ask him to pronounce judgement on the previously alleged crimes.

"Judge Dread, what say you to the allegations against the people of Lima, Ohio?" Keep in mind that I am 5-7 and 150 lbs. I am wearing a suit which looks white under the harsh arena lights. Dread looks to be twice my size and contrasts nicely in all black. I raise the microphone over my head and Judge Dread leans forward and pronounces his only word of the night... "GUILTY!" said in a deep baritone voice. The harmonica music begins to play again and we slowly exit.

SO, HOW'D WE DO?

As I make my way to the back, I think of how well it went, but wonder what the others thought? Dread, whose actual identity is a former college football player named George Van Copenalle, asks me how his performance was and I tell him it was just perfect. As we get to the locker room, booker Al Snow was waiting for us. He has a broad smile on his face and pronounced the whole scenario a resounding success. I feel like I just won the Academy Award.

Just as I began to physically and mentally relax, Al tells me that since the crowd hated me so much, I would be managing the Nightmares in the evening's main event. The Nightmares are a hooded heel tag team who are feuding with ICW Tag Champs, The Wild Bunch, Snow and Kelly. The previous month, one of the Nightmares threw fire into Mike's face causing them to be fined \$7,000. I was to enter the ring, announce my acquisition of



THE NIGHTMARES (Photo Courtesy ICW)

the Nightmares, pay the fine, and work the crowd during the bout.

The Nightmares are a unique father and son-in-law team made up of Woody Coulter and Dave St. Onge. From the minute they found out I was their manager and was new to the business, they began looking out for me and giving me tips and advice. During the locker room conference where everybody goes over their roles during the bout, Woody asks if I get to hit anybody. Al works out a spot where I smack a thick law book on his back as he

lain outside the ring. Al showed me how to do this for maximum effect without actually damaging him. He absorbed several loud whacks with the book admonishing me to hit harder until I got it just right. For the first time, but not the last, the thought hits me square in the cerebral cortex: these guys are damn tough.

WAINWRIGHT AT RINGSIDE

I get introduced for a second time and get a warm response from the crowd. They already hated The Nightmares for burning Mike Kelly last month. They hate me from the Dread skit. Now they have all of us together. I introduce the Nightmares as the next ICW Tag Team Champions. They enter and remind the crowd of last month's festivities when they throw fire into the air. The Wild Bunch comes out and the place goes crazy.

Mike and Al are wearing brightly neon-colored wrestling singlets with leather jackets and sunglasses. They enter to loud rock music and slap lots of hands on the way into the ring. We do some mic work during which I pay the \$7,000 fine and ICW president Joe Furst declares Mike Kelly unfit to wrestle due to the burns on his face. Al Snow attempts to bring in a substitute, but I pull out a contract and quote from page four, article three, section 7, paragraph 2 which clearly prohibits anybody but Kelly & Snow from defending the belts. The crowd hates this, hates the Nightmares, and hates me, the conniving lawyer. I never realized that hate was such a great thing. Joe Furst rules that either Al wrestles the Nightmares by himself if they forfeit the belts. Of course, Al goes at it alone, starts off very hot, puts up a heroic struggle worthy of Hercules, but eventually falls prey to a vicious beating from the two Nightmares. The highlight saw one Nightmare giving Snow a stuff-piledriver on the concrete floor after coming off the top turnbuckle. At the proper time, I smack Al with the law book and deal out my first damage as a pro.

The bout goes over 20 minutes and I do my best to work the crowd. I must stop here and publicly give thanks to Bobby Heenan and the WWF for helping me get over. A steady chant of "weasel, weasel" goes up directed at me for most of the match. Wherever I roam around the ring, several people in that section, successfully programmed by Vince McMahon, chant Heenan's nickname at me.

Remember, Mr. Nudie Bar from the Judge Dread allegations? He is sitting

ringside with a female companion who looks like she works at that massage parlor up on I-75. She is about 25 years old with long unkept black hair. She is wearing a tight tank top that displays some of her more endearing physical assets. She is wonderfully sexy in a terribly cheap way and I wonder why can't all women dress like this? For most of the bout she and Mr. Nudie Bar are getting on me pretty good. After about 15 minutes, she stands up, gets right in my face and screams "fuck you." I took one step back, placed a hand on my hip, and looked at her over the tops of my Ichabod Crane reading glasses. "Promises, promises," I say and she breaks up in a deep bellylaugh. Mr. Nudie Bar does not look so enchanted and I move on to another section.

I get popcorn thrown at me. Two people attempt to offer me a drink by tossing the liquid my way without benefit of a container. And one guy rushes the rail and attempts to slug me in the stomach. After this happens, Joe Furst motions to one of the wrestlers-in-training who double as ring security to shadow me around the ring area. On some nights I know things are hot when I end up with two or even three shadows. The bout ended on a DQ as Mike Kelly storms the ring with a chair to save the very life of his partner. This sets up the no-DQ stipulations for next month's Lima card.

The trip to Lima is also successful for John Muse. He gets a few minutes with Al and explains some of his booking ideas. Al liked his ideas and asked John to write down some specifics and present them in Findlay next week. By the time June rolls around, John is having weekly hour-long conversations on the phone with Al, is helping to run the locker room, and is giving finishes to almost every bout on the card. Al is still running things, but John is acknowledged by everybody as his right-hand man. Al can concentrate more on his wrestling and let John handle a lot of the details that have to be covered in the locker room.

ANOTHER SHOW

On Apr. 25, we make a two-hour drive from Michigan to a dark, dank, and drafty hockey arena in Findley, Ohio. Judge Dread wrestles a personable trainee named Abe Shears. He is a very handsome young black guy and I accuse him of fathering a half dozen children by different women and forcing the various mothers onto the welfare rolls. This is coming from an

avowed political liberal who has never once pulled the Republican lever, was a delegate for George McGovern at the 1972 Democratic Convention in Miami Beach, burned his draft card at the United Nations in New York, and garnered a conscientious objector deferment during the Vietnam war years. Pro wrestling has clearly rotted what remains of my intellectual processes.

Dread quickly squashes the young man and pronounces his guilt. His sentence is carried out as Dread hangs him right in the ring. The crowd looks like they were not quite intelligent enough to be extras in the film "Deliverance." Under normal conditions, I think many of them would really enjoy watching a young black man get hanged. Not so tonight as the only blood they rave is Dread's and my own.

The main event is again The Wild Bunch vs. The Nightmares and this time Al tells me to do whatever seems good at the moment. In one week I have gone from a single carefully scripted whack with a book to being given carte blanche to wreak havoc as desired. I take this as a positive sign of my profession. Before we go on, Mike Kelly has me practice hitting him squarely on the head with my lawbook and briefcase. After four or five attempts, he finally is pleased with the loud sound it produces as it strikes his skull. Again, that same thought hits me that these are tough guys. During the match, I aid the Nightmares with my briefcase, lawbook, tie, and in the best tradition of J.J. Dillon—my shoe. The phrase, "Can I watch?" is begging to be worked in here.

WAINWRIGHT MEETS YOUNG FANS

The show ends at 10:45 p.m. and over 40 minutes later we still are waiting around to get paid. I go out into the arena and sit at a table watching the crew tear down the ring. Two little bonus about three or four years old sit down at the same table and say hello. Using my twenty years of teaching experience, I start talking to them and involve them in making designs with pieces of straw from the arena floor. These kids are soft-spoken, sweet, and loveable. All of a sudden, one of the kids asks if I am a wrestler on the show. I tell him no and try to steer things back to the straw activity. Keep in mind that I am no longer wearing the beige plaid suit or reading glasses. I am wearing jeans and a sweatshirt with a big picture of Mickey Mouse on it. I am using my normal voice and have left the Southern drawl of Wainwright back in the locker room.

One of the kids stares at me. He opens his little eyes to their widest possible stretch, points a tiny finger in my face, and utters with complete conviction, "You're the Weasel!" I attempt to derail this, but the truth has been released and there is no getting it back into the bag. Within seconds, these two charming tots have metamorphosized into real pushy, pains-in-the-butt. We are sitting in a nearly empty cavernous arena and I've got two rugrats chanting "weasel, weasel" at me. I no longer feel so charitable to Bobby Heenan. Scooping up my gear, I retreat to the safety of the locker area with the continued chant in the background.

TIME TO INSULT FIREFIGHTERS

On May 8, we are back in Lima and Judge Dread squashes a real life firefighter who wrestles as Fire Chief Bradley. I accuse him of having a cushy municipal job and participating in insurance fraud which jacks up the premiums for the rest of us poor suckers. Just before I relinquish the mic, I intone, "Judge, I want you to treat this man like a king... Rodney King." I thought this was quite clever until I found out Paul E. Dangerously was using a similar line all week at WCW arena shows. Well, at least twisted minds think alike.

Al Snow and John Muse want to complete the process of turning one of their main babyfaces into a heel and John orchestrates something he calls, "Funeral for a Friend." Judge Dread, both Nightmares, and I, but without benefit of Elton John, bring out a large wooden coffin and hold a burial service in the middle of the ring. Guest of honor is a 28 year old Michigan wrestler Scott "The Rock" Stevens. Almost every young wrestler struggling in the smaller indie circuits has dreams of making it to the big time. Scott Stevens just may have what it takes to make that jump. He has good size, about 6-4 and 260. He was trained by Brad Rheingans and works well in the ring. He is well-muscled, good-looking, and loved the prospect of turning heel.

Gideon Wainwright officiates at the brief ceremony, but after a minute or two I become too overwhelmed with grief to continue. I call out someone new to finish the job. Scott emerges as The Punisher. He has dark face paint, black tights, and enters to the theme music from Phantom of the Opera. In a rough, gravelly voice, he rails at the fans for betraying him and holding back in his quest to obtain the title. He crops up his own picture, insults the promoter, the

referees, and just about every face in the promotion and we all depart to the resounding boos of the crowd.

TIME TO TAKE A BUMP

The main event is a no-DQ title bout pitting The Wild Bunch vs. The Nightmares. And you thought only WCW ran feuds too long. This is the night I am to take my first real bump. Woody and Dave go over this with me upstairs and take great pains showing me how to position myself and how to properly fall on the arena floor so that it looks real, but without getting hurt. The conference which details the match is quite involved since the finish involves the usual four wrestlers, the referee Alan Haugabook, me, plus Judge Dread and a local hometown woman training with Al to be a wrestler-Taffy. They want to do something with Taffy and me and tonight is the start of it. We have eight participants plus John going through an elaborate explanation of the involved finish. For it to work requires each person to do it right with perfect timing.

The bout begins and I quickly find myself trapped outside the ring as both members of The Wild Bunch have a Nightmare firmly in control. They whip both Nightmares toward me and my last thought is to fall properly. Woody and Dave sandwich me and try to absorb most of the bump but I take a short to the right side of the chest, ricochet off the other man, and have no trouble falling to the floor. This is one test I did not have to study for. My ribs will hurt for the next week. The boys go through elaborate and theatrical lengths to revive me but eventually Dave drapes me over a broad shoulder and carries my carcass back to the locker room area. Dave and Woody return to the mat wars while I run upstairs. I wrap my head and chin in elastic bandages and put two Muppet Baby bandages across my nose. I dishevel my clothing and grab a pair of crutches.

A few minutes later I hobble back into the arena into a scene of total carnage. Nearly every fan is on their feet as chairs are littering the ring. The ringside table has been upended and all four men are wailing on each other with chairs. Mike Kelly is awash in his own blood. He has a face full of blood which is running down to his neck and chest. His neon green singlet is splattered with crimson.

My job is to watch for Al and Woody to start brawling back towards the concession stand. When they do, I am to drop the crutches, grab the house mic and go with



A BLOOD MIKE KELLY (Photo Courtesy ICW)

them. This all goes as planned until we get to the concession stand. The two take turns throwing drinks on each other then Woody breaks a large plastic container of ketchup over Al's head. Thick, gooey, red ketchup flies everywhere joining the spilled drinks on the floor. The area is turned into a skating rink. Al hits the floor lying in this mess and Woody covers him. I jump on a nearby chair and scream a ten count into the house mic. In between some numbers I yell "Let's get a referee over here." When no ref shows up, Woody and Al slowly slip-slide away back to the ring. When I get off the chair I nearly lose it and hit the floor.

The ending has Nightmare Dave being KO'd outside the ring while ref A.T. Huck is knocked out cold on the mat. The Wild Bunch proceed to give Nightmare Woody three consecutive stuff powerbombs while I stand on the second rope waving desperately towards the back. Judge Dread comes out, clobbers Mike from behind, does a Boris Karloff imitation in refusing to sell a hard chair shot to the back from Al, and drops him hard to the mat after a power slam to the throat. Dread places a prone Woody across Mike and leaves while I try frantically to awaken the sleeping referee. When my feeble efforts fail, I bail out and try to revive Dave who is still lying on the arena floor. Everybody in the joint is on their feet. From the back comes the cavalry to the rescue as local home town favorite Taffy runs in and switches Woody and Mike and awakens referee Huck. He counts a quick pinfall and the place pops big-time. All this works rather smoothly and the crowd is really pleased since many thought the appearance of Dread signaled a heel victory.

We do some postmatch mic work and set up an explosive match for June 6. Meanwhile, Joe Furst and Al Snow decide to cancel most of the smaller spot shows in favor of concentrating on Lima and getting some type of TV show, even if it is only on a network of cable access stations. The thought of ICW on TV is especially intriguing to John and me and we immediately come up with enough ideas for several three hour long shows. One or two of them are even decent enough to merit eventual consideration.

In addition to the June 6 planned bouts, Al wants the card to whet appetites for a June 19 Lima benefit for St. Jude's Children's Hospitals. We have been averaging about 350 fans at the last three Lima shows and there are hopes of doubling it for the benefit.

TIME TO LEARN THE BASICS

On June 6, John and I leave for Lima, Ohio several hours earlier than normal. Today, we become wrestling trainees in Al Snows crash course. John wants to wrestle Judge Dread in a squash to end all squashes. He has come up with a tremendous match. At least it sounds that way when John describes it, and Al is going to see if either of us can actually do anything in the wrestling ring. They are going to teach me to take a bump so I can add that to future bouts. Al Snow owns and operates a combination wrestling and boxing gym just a few blocks from the Civic Center. We arrive about three in the afternoon and Mike and Al are waiting for us. We change into shorts and kneepads and are ready to become professional wrestlers.

The first thing Al has us do is to fold our arms across our chests and fall backwards onto the mat. John does this like a champ and it sounds great making the desired loud whack. I, on the other hand, keep landing on my butt or throw out my hands at the last moment messing it up. Al and Mike are great teachers. They tell me not to worry since my whole life I have taught myself how to fall without getting hurt. Nobody can naturally take a fall wanting to hit on their upper back. They explain that I have 40 years of conditioning to overcome. Now John is only 22, but he should have taken at least 5 minutes to overcome that conditioning.

Earlier in the week John told me we should go work out on some trampolines. He said we should practice falling on them and learning how to take bumps on them.

He was convinced it would make it easier once we got to Al's gym and had to work on the real thing. In my infinite wisdom I do not disagree with John but silently tell myself this is a dumb idea. Why should I waste my time playing with trampolines when the real thing is so much different. I say nothing to John telling myself the youngster will soon find the folly of his silly ideas.

At Al's gym the trampoline experience of John is reaping vast dividends while I am having trouble just falling backward properly. Al and Mike tell me to rest awhile and they work with John in the ring. Before long John is being hip-tossed hard to the mat, is taking shoulder block takedowns, and is even doing a great flip off a knee to the mid-section. At one point, Mike slams him upside down into the corner turnbuckle and John has the presence of mind to hook his foot under the turnbuckle support. Mike kicks him several times in the stomach just like Masa Fuchi kicks Tsuyoshi Kikuchi. John has taken to this like a baby duck takes to water while I am still trying to figure out how to fall backward.

Since John wants to wrestle Judge Dread, he has to learn to take Dread's finisher—The Judgement Drop. Al ships John into the ropes, and grabs him right under the throat, lifting him off the ground. John's feet go out from under him and Al slams him hard on the back of his shoulders onto the mat. John does this perfectly and the amazing part is he rises up saying it really wasn't that bad. Mike and Al decide to give him their finisher—the stuff powerbomb which they call the Bunchbomb. First, Mike gives John a simple powerbomb. As John hits, his chin bounces up and meets his chest. It looks extremely painful and I am momentarily glad I am preoccupied with trying to fall backward. They then combine to give him an assisted stuff version of the powerbomb with the same chin to chest-bounce.

I am asked back into the squared circle and Al shows me some basic sequential moves which are supposed to desensitize me to hitting backward on the mat. I work with him for about 15 minutes and actually make some progress and by the end of it can do a front flip and land squarely on my back without messing it up. Mike knows I want to come off the top during the six man match so he shows me how to climb to the top and leap off. He tells me not to worry since he will catch me. He certainly does catch me and so does his shoulder into my

left rib cage. Many years ago I cracked a rib playing basketball and this feels a lot like that did. Mike checks the ribs and says everything is still where it should be and we continue. We practice with him pressing me high overhead and throwing me onto Al Snow. This is a lot scarier looking than it really is and Al catches me and we roll to the mat without injury.

They want me to keep climbing the top turnbuckle and practice balancing up there for long periods. I do this while John gets back in and they begin to work several connected spots actually making it look like a match. Before we complete our first lesson, I get in with wrestler Rex Bode and he gives me seven or eight Russian leg sweep takedowns to get me used to falling backward.

TIME TO VISIT THE DOCTOR

Over the next week several interesting reminders surface to remind both of us of our training. John experiences a very sore neck, back, and stomach. He is young and by the end of the week is feeling none the worse for wear. Both my upper arms turn different shades of yellow and brown with bruises. They do not hurt but look like I am in the early stages of leprosy. My ribs, on the other hand, do hurt and as the week goes on hurt like hell. A week later I go and have them x-rayed and find out nothing is cracked. The doctor tells me I have two or three weeks I should be fine. I do not tell anybody associated with wrestling that I went to the doctor. My fondest hope is that everything is completely healed by the 19th since I have big plans for my pro debut.

The June 6 Lima card turns out to be the highest quality card yet. Roughhouse Randy Rogers and Dango The Asian Air Force have a solid three star match which gets the crowd into things early. John has come up with something called the Iron Man Rumble which is a cross between a battle royal and Titans Royal Rumble. Six wrestlers will compete with the winner getting a title shot on the 19th against ICW champ Johnny Paradise.

Bracketed around the intermission is the drawing for the Iron Man entrance numbers. Local hero Taffy runs the drawing and I will pick last for Judge Dread. The drawing must create heat between Taffy and me to set up a June 19 six person mixed match. Before I select the number, I ask the ring announcer if he trusts Taffy to handle this responsibility. He nods yes and I tell him that I do not since it's common knowledge that she is

not very bright. "This here Taffy went to college for one year on an affirmative action scholarship. They gave her to the football team and her job was to keep those boys firm and give them plenty of action." When I do this line, the first person I check with for a reaction is Joe Furst who sits at the ringside timer's table. Joe owns the operation and for some strange reason loves my material and character. The affirmative action line pleases him into genuine laughter. So far so good.

CHOCOLATE CREAM PIE

The remainder of the Wainwright—Taffy skit goes like this: "On the way over here to the arena tonight I heard Taffy being interviewed on the radio. The radioman asked her what her favorite food was and she replied chocolate cream pie. Isn't that right, girl?" Taffy responds in the affirmative and I continue. "Now everybody here knows that last month you interfered with my men, The Nightmares, and cost them the title belts. But just to show what a great, magnificent individual I am, that I do not carry grudges, I stopped at a bakery and bought a chocolate cream pie." Every time I say the words chocolate cream pie, I make it a lot slower with emphasis on each word so that even the densest mark can see what is coming. It seems to work since the usually unruly crowd that screams through Wainwright's usual railings, noticeably quiets down at the pies mention.

Remember the Redford-Newman Film "The Sting?" This is the part that would have the lobby card that says "The Hook." Wainwright drawls, "Now this ain't some cheap \$1.59 Ohio pie, this is a ten dollar deluxe bakery chocolate cream pie. Now here is what I propose to do with it. I have faith that my man, Judge Dread, is gonna win this here Iron Man Rumble tonight. I propose a little friendly wager to show you I have no hard feelings against you. I am willing to take my man, The Judge, and give you all the other five men in this contest. You get Mr. Havoc, Mr. Bode, Mr. Rogers, Dango, and even The Punisher."

Right away, people either start yelling for Taffy to take the deal or stay away from it. Like P.T. Barnum once said, there's a sucker born every minute. Wainwright lets out a little bit more bait. "Now if any one of your five men win this here match, you Taffy, you win the pie. And you can do anything you want with that pie." I accent the word anything so that even those in the back row who have already consumed too

many beers, can see the word is in capital letters and underlined. Even Ray Charles can see this one coming. Taffy takes the mic and asks, "I can do anything I want with that pie?" I reassure her. "You can do anything you want with that chocolate cream pie. You can eat it right here. You can take it home to your family. You can drop it off at a children's orphanage. You can send it to the starving people in Africa. You can do anything you want with that pie."

This sounds like a pretty good proposal, but by now some of the brighter types in the front rows are shouting to ask what I get if I win the bet. Taffy so inquires and I announce my intentions. "Now remember girl, I bought the pie. So if I win the bet, I really don't win much. So if I win you and me are going to play a little game of Roman Emperor and the slave girl." When I watched this later on videotape, it occurred that the best line of the night would have been for Taffy to ask "Which one are you?" Maybe we can use that when we get TV and run this for a much wider audience. I then widen my eyes and get a wicked look about me. "Right here in this ring, in front of all your hometown people, you girl are going to feed me that chocolate cream pie with your own sweet little fingers. You're going to scoop up that filling and place it on my lips, my tongue, in my mouth right here in the ring." The crowd responds as if I just molested the mayor's daughter on the city hall steps. Taffy says "That's disgusting—but I'll take that bet."

The Iron Man Rumble goes on and Judge Dread enters sixth and last. The crowd cannot believe it when Dread methodically eliminates each of the competitors climaxing with the Punisher at the 15 minute mark. As Dread's hand is being raised, I enter the ring with the mic and call Taffy to pay the Piper. As she gathers up the pie off the timer's table, and carefully climbs into the ring, I say several times, "I want that pie." Taffy gingerly holds the pie in her right hand and I stand to her right. I tease the whole thing by reminding her of what she is to do and say, "I want to taste those sweet little fingers on my tongue. Now give me that pie right here in my mouth." She takes the mic from me in her left hand and says, "You want this pie? You really want it?" I respond with "I want that pie—give it to me."

I honestly believe that every fan in the building figured right from the start that the pie was going to end up in my face. Even when Dread won against five to one

odds, they still figured I would get my due. That's the way we set it up. Now comes the part that reads "The Sting." Taffy turns to her left toward the ring announcer and says "hold this" as she hands him the house mic. As she turns her head back toward me, I place my right hand under hers and drive that chocolate pie home right in the middle of her lovely face. After 15 minutes under the hot arena lights, the pie is mostly creamed liquid and it flies everywhere. Even Joe Furst at ringside gets a taste. I grab the house mic, throw Taffy down to her knees, and berate her for interfering in my business and admonish her that she should never do it again.

All of this is designed to create heat between Taffy and me and set up the six person bout on the 19th. When I proposed this idea to Al, I thought I had the perfect finish to it. I would reach down to Taffy, lift up her face to mine, and lick off some of the chocolate cream on her face. If that didn't get the crowd going, I hate to imagine what would. Al said that would be in bad taste—not the chocolate cream but the licking part—and I could not do that. So instead I wiped my finger across her cheek and tasted that. I then asked Judge Dread if he wanted some, but he declined. We then slowly left the ring to an escort of at least four people. The crowd was livid with threats and profanities and I just knew in my heart that every last one of them was going to be back on the 19th to see me get mine.

REVENGE IS SET UP

We followed this bout with another Wild Bunch vs. Nightmares bout in which falls count anywhere and this time The Nightmares win the straps. The finish has me being chased on the outside by Mike Kelly. I throw my briefcase to Woody who hides behind the ringpost. Next time around Mike gets decked by the briefcase and pinned onto the floor. At the same time, a second ref is about to count a pinfall on Nightmare Dave as Al Snow has him rolled up in the middle of the ring. I slide into the ring and grab Huck's arm just as it is about to go down for the third time.

The Nightmares and I are celebrating with the belts inside the ring while Al is on the arena floor attending to a very groggy Mike Kelly. The fans, already angered since Dread won the Rumble and Taffy got the pie in the face, are now going berserk because of The Nightmares defeating the Bunch. Al takes the mic and we begin to set up the six person bout. In alternate verbal

exchanges, Al blames me for their loss and challenges me to get into the ring and defend my honor if I have any. I then go through a whole series of reasons why I would simply love to wrestle but cannot do so. Each time I come up with a reason, Al has a counter to it.

"I do not have a wrestling license."—We will buy it for you.

"I do not have any wrestling gear to wear."—You can wear anything you want. You can come buck naked for all we care.



THE WILD BUNCH: AL SNOW & MIKE KELLY
(Photo Courtesy ICW)

"Three-on-two would be a violation of fairness and the American Way."—We will pick somebody to even things out.

"There is no wrestler in this promotion who is my size, 5-7 and 150 lbs. To put me in with a big muscled wrestler would not be fair."—Then out comes Taffy and she offers to be the partner of Al and Mike. The crowd goes bonkers for that one. The Nightmares confer and we want it made clear that we can kick her, punch her, hurt her just like any man—Al says that's right. Woody tells me he can knock her out with one punch, two at the most, and we accept the offer. Thirteen days later the six of us will wrestle, me for the very first time.

In the intervening two weeks I suffer from serious delusions of grandeur. I get it into my head that my one appearance in a wrestling ring should be memorable. I want it to be something that people talk about, write about, and search out on

videotape. Andy Warhol said that someday everyone would be famous for 15 minutes. This was my quarter hour and I wanted it to be something. I told John Muse that I wanted to do something that had never been done before in a wrestling ring. Here is what I came up with.

TIME FOR THE MOVE OF THE YEAR!

Mike Kelly would get me in the Hase Big Swing. Since Mike stands seven inches over me and outweighs me by a good 100 pounds, that should be easy. He would spin me for five, ten, fifteen revolutions. Then at an agreed upon number, he would raise my prone body to shoulder height and let me go over the top rope. Now I know this sounds suicidal and makes me out to be totally crazy. I thought I had it covered in two ways. First, they said I could wear anything I wanted and what I planned was a football uniform complete with full pads and helmet. That would give me some protection. Second, we would have The Nightmares outside the ring positioned to catch me as I come over the top rope. Even if they did not catch me cleanly, they would grab enough of me as I went by to break the fall. The football gear should do the rest.

This madness is carefully explained to John, Mike, and Al. All three have the same reaction. It's completely crazy, but if you want to try it, go ahead. I explain it to Gail, my wife of 21 years, who is no wrestling fan. She, quite frankly, hates the stuff, but is tremendously tolerant of my obsession with it. Her reaction was a very calm: "Did you make this month's insurance payment on your life policy?"

BACK TO REALITY

A few days later I am talking to Dave Meltzer by phone. I tell Dave of the move and ask him if it has ever been done before. Without pausing to think about it, Dave quickly responds that nobody has ever done it. This makes me very happy. For a brief millisecond, I see the name of Gideon Wainwright in the *Wrestling Observer Yearbook* winning the "Best Move of the Year." I ask Dave what he thinks of the move and he just as quickly replies that he would not do it. Too many things can go wrong and you could get really hurt.

I honestly believe that Dave has forgotten more about professional wrestling than all the rest of us can ever hope to know. If there was a wrestling knowledge contest and your first pick was to have Dave on your team, the other side

would have to get the next 50 picks to even it up. Even then I would be on Dave's team to win. So when I hear Dave Meltzer say he would not do it, it sinks in and sinks in hard and fast.

Later that same day, Gail and I are out shopping and we see a woman pass us in a wheelchair. I joke about being in that shape after the bout on the 19th. Without missing a beat, Gail gently shakes her head and says "No. That's how you will hope to look after many years of painful therapy." By the end of the day I call John and tell him I am no longer going to do the Big Swing over the top rope. Fans looking for a best move of the year will have to look for something else.

Since John is now helping to book many of the bout endings, we work out a great ending to this one. I figure if I cannot do the Big Swing, I can at least do a Santo dive off the top turnbuckle to the arena floor. At 150 pounds, I can be very easily caught by two guys waiting there. I would rise up, totally sky high by just clearing the deck of the opposition. I would jump onto the ring apron and begin waving my arms to the crowd in a signal of impending victory. Just then, Taffy would be in the ring and tap me on the shoulder. She would slap me across the face, grab me on the ring apron, and suplex me into the ring over the top rope. I would lay there quivering like a fish out of water while she ran to a secret cooler and got her own special chocolate cream pie.

Just as I got up on one shaky leg and on the other knee, Taffy would run across the ring and slam the pie into my face. I would go down like a ton of bricks, she would place a dainty foot across my chest, one, two, three, it would be over. The crowd would get just what they came for since Taffy is the big winner, I am the big loser, and I get the cream pie to boot. John and I are both convinced this finish is as tight as possible and is a guaranteed winner.

WOMEN'S UNDERWEAR?

A few days before the bout, Mike Kelly calls and tells me that Al does not like the finish we have come up with. So far, they have let me do everything I want with the Wainwright character. John has been given wide latitude in presenting his ideas. But make no mistake about it, Al is still booker, it is his promotion, and that is not the finish. Mike tells me that I will not take the pin on the 19th. I am going to bring in a pie,

attempt to hit Taffy with it, she will duck, and I will hit one of the Nightmares by mistake. He will be blinded, get rolled up from behind, and be pinned.

Mike, laughing fiercely, tells me that while I am standing there looking despondent, Taffy will sneak up behind me and pull down my football pants revealing, of all things, me wearing women's underwear! By this time, Mike is laughing out of control and I am stone cold silent. The rest of the call does not go well and we have our first major problem with Gideon Wainwright and me.

It occurs to me that perhaps my ego is getting in the way. After all, I had walked around in the delusion that I was going to do the move of the year before more intelligent beings talked sense into me. Perhaps I just was not seeing the logic in this women's underwear ending. Trusting John's opinion, I call him and run through it. I am pleased to no end when John pronounces it totally unacceptable. We pat ourselves on the backs and go over a zillion reasons why our ending was much better and decide if they insist on the women's underwear, they would have to get another Wainwright to do it.

Mike and I talk a few more times and he tells me I cannot do the job on the 19th since it would finish the feud. They do not want this to be the blow-off and have bigger things planned for me. They want to do a Wild Bunch vs. Nightmare cage match to finish off the whole series and if the Nightmares lose, Taffy gets five minutes with me in the cage. All of a sudden, I brighten considerably. Five minutes in a cage. That sounds like it has real possibilities. I see the ending right now. Taffy throws me face first into all four sides of the cage as the crowd roars its approval. And, of course, you cannot bounce off four sides of a steel cage without—you guessed it—blood. I would get to blade right there. This was getting better by the minute. Without telling Mike my plan to open up my veins, I say I could accept not doing the job but would never be caught dead with the women's underwear. He suggests colorful boxer shorts and the deal is done.

MURPHY'S LAW TAKES OVER

Sooner or later Murphy's Law had to catch up with me. Things had been going too smoothly in the ring ever since I first tried on Wainwright's suit. It had almost been too easy. I should have known that

eventually the tables would turn and disaster would strike. That disaster occurred on June 19 in Lima.

We have been averaging about 350 people over the last three Lima shows and there are barely 150 bodies in the Civic Center. The conventional wisdom: We were foolish for putting on two Lima shows just 13 days apart in a town which is economically depressed. It also turns out that there has been absolutely no advertising done of any kind for this card. Nothing in the paper, radio, TV, posters, nothing. Al has loaded the card with several disc jockeys whom he expected would plug the card on their daily radio shows. That has not happened and the disc jockeys simply show up and expect to have a real good time.

The upstairs locker area is usually a bevy of activity but tonight it seems like a morgue. Joe Furst stops by and proclaims the conventional wrestling line that you just cannot sell wrestling tickets in the summer time. One local wrestler adds that Lima is a welfare town and we would be far better off promoting the first week of the month when people have some cash in their pockets. The undercard bouts stink since each one has one or two local disc jockeys who are not selling and some laugh their way through the bouts. Everybody can see the iceberg approaching and there is a feeling that we should just hurry this through and get the hell out of there.

Judge Dread gets his title shot against ICW champ Johnny Paradise and everything falls into place here. John books a great finish which has Dread and me hanging Paradise during a ref bump. Dread backs up to the opposite corner, yells "guilty," and attempts to finish him off with a huge smash in the corner. Paradise pulls off the noose, throwing me into the ringpost, and Dread is knocked silly by the corner. Paradise slides outside and places the black bag over my head along with the noose and throws the rope onto Dread. A few seconds later, Dread gets to his feet, sees the rope and a hooded figure barely visible above ring level, and starts to hang him. The crowd pops big as I fight for my life. Just as Dread realizes what he is doing, Paradise sneaks in and rolls up for the pin.

THE PLAN...

We have our prematch conference and I am told there will be no Santo leap off the top since it does not fit into the roll they

have for me. I am to be like a small frisky terrier who never really comes out to fight but occasionally sneaks in and nips at the heels of his enemies when they are not looking. Mike has worked out a comedy spot with me and that is about the extent of it. Normally, I would have been royally pissed at the nixing of the Santo spot since I really wanted to do it. However, the downer atmosphere of the entire evening robs me of any spirit and I put up very little verbal fight.

Disaster occurs almost immediately in the main event. I have a football uniform with helmet that I intend to work in. We have worked out a big entrance where the other five are already introduced, but no Gideon Wainwright has shown up.

The plan was for them to turn off the lights, play my entrance music—"Bat Out Of Hell" by Meat Loaf—and me entering in a darkened arena with two oversize three-foot sparklers burning brightly taped to the sides of my helmet. When I get to the ring, The Nightmares will lift me over the top and I will stand on their shoulders. When they place me down, the lights will go back on and I will turn my back and shadow box in the corner. Both Nightmares will bail out of the ring when the three opponents take out handguns. When I turn around and see the three with guns, I am to drop to my knees and beg for my life like some cartoon mouse trapped by the big housecat. They will then point the guns at my head and shoot streams of water putting out the large sparklers.

...AND ITS EXECUTION

In a dry run at home, it takes four minutes for my son and me to light a sparkler. To avoid this problem at the arena, we soak the tips in lighter fluid so they will start when the music does. The music starts and two attendants attempt to light the sparklers. The lighter fluid burns away quickly, but the sparklers do not ignite. This goes on for three minutes and we give up and I enter a darkened arena with a football helmet with huge sparklers sticking off into space. Al Snow says "My God, it's a Martian."

Despite the fact that the sparklers are not blazing away, the Wild Bunch trio open fire with their squirt guns on all three of us. We bail out and regroup. At the bell, I tease the audience by starting the match and do some shadow boxing and footwork, but as soon as Mike Kelly gets near me I step back and tag out. I get a few chuckles. The bout is pretty lousy. I do my terrier attacks and

have one big spot where I come off the second rope and axe handle Al Snow who sells it tremendously making me look like Randy Savage. Taffy does the best move of the match when she walks the top rope, does the Owen Hart sit down bounce flip off the top and finishes it off by climbing to the top and doing a somersault flip onto Woody. Al takes a beating during the mid-portion of the bout and Mike and I do our prearranged comedy spot. One of the Nightmares has Mike from behind and I tell him to stand Mike up holding his arms. I come flying in and give him a forearm into the chest. He throws off the Nightmare and sells nothing. Woody hits him from behind, holds him again, and I repeat the attack, but this time fall to my knees holding my hurt arm. Then Mike grabs me and begins demonstrating how I should properly do it. I try one more and he tells me to bounce off the ropes and do it. I come off the ropes, give him the forearm to the chest, and roll to the ground. He picks me up and takes me to his corner and tags Taffy in. Before she can do anything, I scurry to my corner's safety and tag out.

We go to the finish where I attempt to plaster Taffy with a pie, she ducks, and Woody gets hit by mistake. Mike rolls him up from behind, A.T. Huck counts to three and it is over. Taffy pulls down my football pants revealing loud and colorful boxer shorts and we bail out and go home. Everybody agrees that his one does not get on the ICW 1992 highlight film. Taffy gets one star for her sequence, but the rest of it gets a DUD.

Over the next week we have two more spot shows and the crowds are back up into the 300 to 400 range. Both shows go off with just a few minor glitches and the ICW seems to get back on track. Joe Furst tells me that he will shortly bring in a new partner who will finance TV production and distribution and he has some ideas for a special segment showcasing Wainwright. Things seem to be back on track.

And after a couple great months being part of the independent wrestling scene, the fun continues. With subsequent shows in front of prisoners, and main event cage matches, the strangest moments of all are sure to be part of the future.

Time to go, because I've got to get to the gym to practice the Hase Swing. This fairy tale, dear readers, has yet to end.

Chris Zavisa of Plymouth, Mich. is a Japanese wrestling columnist for Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly.

ADVENTURES OF GRAND WIZARD?

Or Adventures of Prof. Hymie Pierre Irwin Mark Curtis Schwartz

By Brian Hildebrand

Back in the old days, wrestlers and managers often changed names when changing territories depending on the promoter's whim Hulk Hogan had a couple. The Grand Wizard did, too. Even my old buddy "Downtown Bruno" Lauer has changed his name.

Does a change in name or character have any bearing on one's appearance or managing style? You betcha'.

While I have used all of the names in the above title in some sort of combination. Over my last ten years involved in this sport, the most widely known two were H.P. Schwartz and Dr. Mark Curtis.

H.P. SCHWARTZ (1981-'85)

Hymie Pierre Schwartz, 1981-85 R.I.P. H.P. was born in the mind of Newton Tattrie who said that "Mark Curtis, the Monster of Disaster" was a great wrestling name, but not for a manager. He also added that H.P. was the illegitimate son of the Grand Wizard which I didn't understand at the time.

"I am a business manager, an associate of my men," said Schwartz in the worst attempt at a Jewish accent possible. "I am only here to oversee that my wrestlers are taken care of properly."

However, the wrestlers he managed were an impressive lot, including The Sheik, "Bulldog" Don Kent, Abdullah the Butcher, Zoltan the Great, Geeto Mongol, and others. It seems that when the younger wrestlers could not get heat, that is when H.P. would get a new man. H.P. also had a feud with a midget named Moses where there were actual matches between the two, where of course justice prevailed and Moses emerged victorious.

The most heat ever was garnished in a



H.P. SCHWARTZ WITH CRUSHER KLEBANSKI
(Courtesy Hildebrand Collection)

Cleveland bar show in 1983 managing the Pittsburgh Assassins (rumored to be ex-Steelers with masks). The suit he wore was drenched with assorted brands of liquor, beer, and condiments. His half-cane (like Red Berry used to carry—imagine a cane for a midget) was yanked by a fat, drunk, toothless woman at ringside. He also received several bumps on his head from glass ashtrays being thrown forward into the ring. Isn't the security for small indy shows great?

His most memorable moment was at the Uniontown, Pa. fair in '84, when Wendy Richter's opponent didn't show up. So, H.P. took her place in the first-ever man vs. woman match in Pennsylvania. It was agreed that the match would last less than a

minute. Mr. Schwartz became the bump machine for the next 7:34. He took backdrops, bodyslams, suplexes, over the top rope bumps, between the ropes bumps. Ms. Richter kept throwing him out of the ring and he kept getting back in. Finally, a small package ended it.

"I didn't know you could work," she said afterward. "I'd rather work with you than most of the women I wrestle. I kept throwing you out so you could win. Why did you keep getting back in?"

"We agreed on a small package pin right!?" said H.P.

His funniest moment came when a Jewish Cadillac dealer asked to meet H.P. After telling the manger how great he was, the elderly gent told him that he wanted H.P. to meet his daughter. H.P. said he would love to, but he had to go to the synagogue the next day (Sunday) and he then excused himself. H.P. walked down the hall to find Don Kent doubled over in laughter. "Jewish people go to services on Saturday!" Kent told him.

Another funny moment was hearing Abdullah speak for the first time. "Hey, babe!" said Abby.

Unfortunately in 1985, H.P. Schwartz passed away when he found out the reason behind being "The Grand Wizard's illegitimate son"—what it meant, anyway. Others said it was because another gent managing as Dr. Boris Spazinski stole most of his gimmick (or what had evolved) and went to Memphis—a place where H.P. had been negotiating to go for months.

DR. MARK "EKG" CURTIS (1980-??)

The self-proclaimed "doctor and master of disaster" began and remains to some extent a wrestler. Before the Lightning Kid made being a hard-working skinny smart ass a national rave, there was Mark Curtis. The last name came from the my middle name, Curtis, and the first being what he is and always will be, a true "mark."

Yes, M.C. existed during H.P.'s time, wrestling for indies, but his switch to managing came around the same time as Mr. Schwartz's death (almost instantly, as a matter of fact). It was also around this time when he began helping Dom DeNucci train guys at his gym. One being Troy Martin and the other Mike Foley. The three of them would eventually become famous (or at least two). During this

continued on page 76

TORCH TOP TEN LISTS

Torch Top Ten Lists, The Original, Before Letterman... Really!

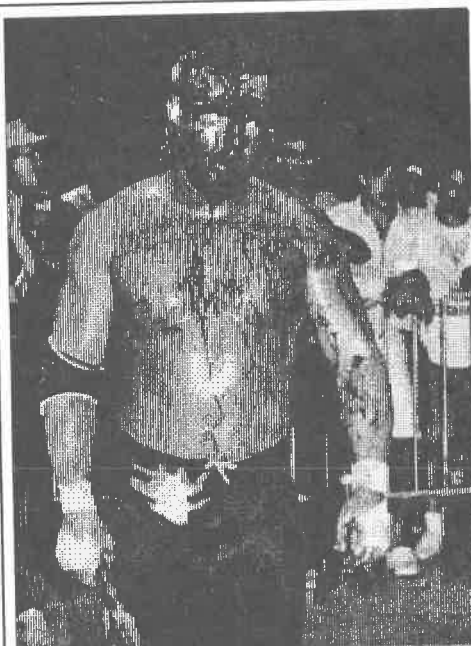
By The Torch Readers

Top Ten Items WWF Should Sell That They Don't... (Travis Lee Nelson)

- 10) Arrogance.
- 9) Mr. Perfect Wrestling Buddy.
- 8) Diploma with Your Name on it from College of Genius.
- 7) Big Bossman Pre-Signed Search Warrants.
- 6) Undertaker Pillow So you Can "Rest in Peace."
- 5) Tatanka/Ric Flair Car Alarm.
- 4) Sensational Sherri Make-Up Kit.
- 3) Natural Disasters' "Shake the Foundation" Work Out Video.
- 2) Bushwacker/Skinner Dental Floss.
- 1) Sid Justice Squeegee.

Top Ten Pick-Up Lines From Eddie Gilbert... (David Jacobson)

- 10) I'm Eddie Gilbert and I don't take abuse well.
- 9) Can I buy you a couple dozen drinks?
- 8) I can introduce you to Cactus Jack (this line worked better when he used Stan Lane, but with the success of Smoky Mountain).
- 7) I was once "Rookie of the Year."
- 6) I have the best submission hold in the business.
- 5) Stay with me and I can make you into a wrestling valet.
- 4) You aren't one of my ex-wives are you?
- 3) I've spent half my life covered in blood, being hit by trash cans and licking other people's boots, and that's just my job.
- 2) I am actually clint black without the hat.
- 1) I'm Eddie Gilbert and I survived a Texas Barbed-Wire Death Match.



EDDIE GILBERT (Photo by Wade Keller)

Recently, while speeding to the arena, the overworked and underpaid WCW equipment manager fell asleep behind the wheel on the WCW equipment truck and went off the road. He suffered no serious injuries, but during the accident, the various costumes and props got bounced around and thoroughly mixed-up. Being a conscientious and highly motivated WCW employee, he quickly fixed the truck, and sped to the arena, arriving just as the matches were scheduled to begin. The wrestlers did not have time to find their proper costumes, so they grabbed whatever tights, boots, and gimmicks they could find. **This is the List of New Characters That Resulted... (Ken Knisely)**

- 10) "Stunning" Steve Sandlin.
- 9) "Jumping" Junkyard Dog.
- 8) Zo (Oz with his clothes inside out).

7) Arachnibrad (Brad found his old bodysuit, but could not find the mask).

6) The Candy Dog (Poor Brian Pillman could only find his old mask and Brad's old Candyman tights).

5) "The World's Strongest Man" Richard Morton (he wears the same size boots as Bill Kazmaier).

4) "The Bodyguard" Lady Blossom (Curtis could not find his bra, so he borrowed the one that belonged to the recently departed valet. It fit perfectly).

3) Johnny B. Long (Poor Johnny B. Badd, who could not find anything but Teddy Long's hat and jockstrap).

2) "The Natural" Lex Luger

1) "The Rapmaster" Bobby Eaton (The bodysuit was a bit loose, but Bobby managed. After Bobby rapped, he earned the new nickname, "Excellence of Elocution").

Top Ten Things That The Average Wrestling Fan Believes Probably Happened to Miss Elizabeth... (Elyse Zois)

- 10) She ran off with Jake the Snake.
- 9) She went home to wash socks.
- 8) She failed the steroid test.
- 7) She's looking for Vanna White's job.
- 6) She wanted to be in a bikini contest.
- 5) She's jealous of Cameo.
- 4) She ran off with Ric Flair.
- 3) She ran away from Ric Flair.
- 2) She was scared away by Papa Shango.
- 1) She finally ran off with George "The Animal" Steele.

The Top Ten Gimmicks That Would Have Made Mike Graham Worth Watching... (Matt Peabody)

- 10) The Midnight Jobber.
- 9) Paul E. Jobbery.
- 8) Mike the Butcher (of Highspots)
- 7) The Job Machine.
- 6) Mike Von Jobich.
- 5) "Rowdy" Roddy Jobber
- 4) The Ultimate Jobber.
- 3) John Oliver Bruening
- 2) Mil Jobberas
- 1) Mr. Mess up and make a Japanese star look bad in front of a national audience.

Top Ten Books Stephen King Would Have Written If He Was A Wrestling Fan (and a Torch reader)... (Robert Lee Solari)

10) Misery—The story of a columnist named Mark Madden who is involved in a serious car accident and is left at the mercy of his number one fan Virgil Runnels Jr. who wants a special column written about his favorite character.

9) Fire Starters—Ed Farhat and Eddie Gilbert are Guinea Pigs for a genetic experiment to increase the metabolic rate in the human body. But a miscalculation leaves the two men with the power to shoot fire from their hands.

8) Winston—A British Bulldog runs amok at a WWF TV taping after being bitten by a weasel.

7) Memphis Town—Story of a wrestling community cut off from the world that is ruled by an evil king and a deep, dark secret.

6) Pet Cemetery —A young man named Jake brings his dead pet snake Damien back to life by burying it in a very special place.

5) The Dead Zone—A secret government project sends Brian Pillman into the strange world between Sid Eudy's ears in order to cure him of squeegie-softballitus, a deadly disorder.



BRIAN PILLMAN (Photo by Wade Keller)

4) Thinner—Buddy Rose splashes the daughter of a very powerful gypsy. He puts a curse on Rose, who starts losing weight at an alarming rate.

3) Sherrie—A woman dished her whole life, uses her telekinetic powers to turn Wrestlemania X into a bloodbath.

4) Graveyard Shift—The dead rise again under the spell of Papa Shango who, in cahoots with Paul Bearer, wants to replace wrestlers with undead duplicates

under his control,

1) The Stand—A Deadly Virus (ster-x grow hormone-y) wipes out 99 percent of the wrestlers in the U.S. The ones remaining gravitate two ways: to the Whiff, the forbidden zone lorded over by Vince McBlagg, and to the Alliance, the promised land where Father Bill presides, the world's oldest redneck promoter. The two sides Clash and Rumble with each other for supremacy.

Top Ten Things That Sid Eudy Did After Leaving the WWF... (Bill Strong)

10) Replaced Whippleman's beverage of choice with new Folger's crystals.

9) Thought about becoming a boxer, but gave it up when both Derrick Dukes and Paul Roma refused to take the dive for him.

8) Felt really, really bad when Bill Watts laughed at him on the telephone.

7) Asked his opposing team's first base coach, "Are those Bugle Boy Jeans?"

6) Practices using the built-in-switch for future drug tests.

5) Hooked it up so that he could get his steroid injections to work off of "The Clapper." 4) Lost the gig as technical advisor of the movie, "Ernest Goes to Wrestling School."

3) Enrolled at McDonald's "Hamburger University."

2) Stretchered out some pitching machines at local batting cages.

1) He finally learned that he does not rule the world.

Top Ten Ways I Plan To Try To Discourage My Son From Becoming a Pro Wrestler... (John Mohlman)

10) Invite Fabulous Freebirds to his 10th Birthday Party as "the entertainment."

9) Tell him being a wrestler allows you to use really cool names like Manson, Chip, and Dr. Festus.

8) Name Herb Abrams as his godfather.

7) Remind him that eating his veggies will help him get big and strong, just like Todd Champion.

6) Send him on a weekend camping trip with Hacksaw Duggan and P.N. News.

5) Make him watch tapes of "The Wonder Years" while screaming, "Is that the type of person you want to be involved with? Hah!?"

4) Fine him for breaking curfew.

3) Buy him a copy of the Jim Cornette

"Fit For Life" video workout.

2) Introduce him to Herb Abrams.

1) Arrange private audition for him with Cyndi Lauper, pray she'll knock some sense into him.

The Top Ten Co-Hosts For "WCW Saturday Night" Who Would Have Been on Had the Format Not Been Cancelled... (Frank Carr)

10) Sean Penn.

9) Soupy Sales.

8) Shirley McLaine.

7) Spinal Tap.

6) Howie Mandel and Gallagher.

5) Fawn Hall and Jessica Hahn.

4) Larry "Bud" Melman.

3) Muhammed Ali.

2) Jackie Stallone.

1) Sherri Lewis and Lambchop.

Top Ten Rejected Character Ideas... (James Soloman)

10) Gus, the Really Tall Parking Attendant.

9) The Ladder of Splatter.

8) Heidi.

7) Pesticide Man.

6) The Human Spitwad.

5) Whopper Boy.

4) Herd's Terd.

3) Linda, the Cross-Dressing Geraldo Guest.

2) The Narcoleptic Warrior.

1) Captain Condom.

Top Ten Bad Things About Jushin Liger... (Matt Peabody)

10) His Mask Has "Pointy Things."

9) Often asked If He Is Related to Voltron.

8) He's No Jack Kennedy.

7) Doesn't Bend Steel Around His Neck.

6) Failed the Pepsi Challenge.

5) Frequently Mistaken for the Unknown Comedian.

4) Can't Breakdance.

3) No Matter How Hard He Tries, He Will Never Be As Flamboyant as Mike Graham.

2) Is Unable to Slam Andre the Giant Like the "Immortal" Hulk Hogan.

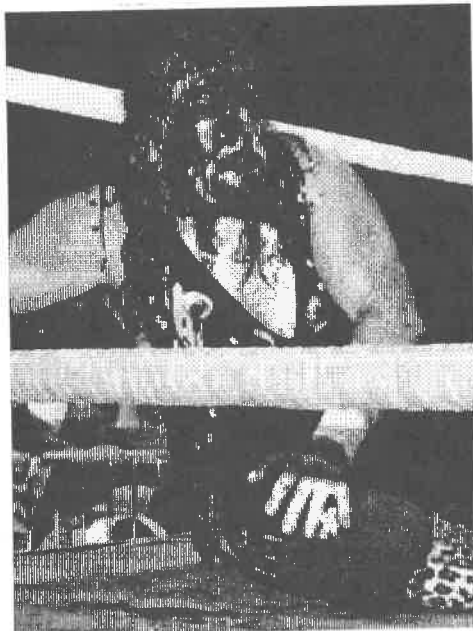
1) Let's Face It, U.S. Fans Will Never Go For High-Flying, Fast-Paced, Hard-Hitting Action Like Liger's.

Top Ten Ways Cactus Jack Celebrates Easter... (James Solomon)

10) Sang "Easter Parade" Until Bells in Head Subsided.

9) Bit the Head Off Chocolate Bunny.

8) Hid Eggs, Found Them, and Then Stomped Them Until They Bled.



CACTUS JACK (Photo by Wade Keller)

7) Helped Abdullah Pick Out A Pretty, Blue Bonnet.

6) Jumped Off Roof of House, Landed on Peter Cottontail.

5) Wrote Letter to Heloise, Asking Advice on Removing Spit Stains from Ceiling.

4) Went to Church... Beat up the Choir.

3) Sobbed Uncontrollably When He Reflected on the Lack of Love and Understanding in Our Society.

2) Ambushed Paper Boy, Kicked the Crap Out of Him.

1) He Tried To Crucify Himself, But Ran Out of Nails.

Top Ten Ways To Tell Dave Hebner From Earl Hebner... (James Solomon)

10) In middle of match, yell, "Hey, Dave, look out!" If you get no response, wait five minutes and then yell, "Hey, Earl, look out!" Works every time.

9) Dave cried while watching "Ghost." Earl found it too sappy.

8) Dave has secretary names Earl. Earl has secretary named Dave.

7) Earl refuses to search for foreign objects.

6) Dave can never tell which one is Butch and which one is Luke.

5) Earl's bow tie doubles as a secret

micro-phone (Bret hart matches only).

4) Dave goes into epileptic fit every time he hears the word, "Huss!"

3) Earl thinks he's the secret lovechild of Andre the Giant. Dave knows better.

2) Every time Ric Flair flips over the turnbuckle, Earl has weird habit of covering both eyes and screaming, "Oh my God, he's dead!"

1) Dave's the one in the blue shirt.

Top Ten Things Overheard In A Pro Wrestling Singles Bar... (James Solomon)

10) "You must be Curt Hennig's sister, 'cause you sure look like Miss Perfect to me."

9) "Is that a telephone in your pocket or is little Paul E. just happy to see me?"

8) "Forget Sweet Stan, I'll show you a Rocket Launcher."

7) "I Looooooooove You!"

6) "What's Jim Herd doing in that maid's uniform?"

5) "Huss! Huss! Huss!"

4) "Hey, baby. How'd you like to go home with an overpaid steroid freak?"

3) "You left the lights on in your Nissan, Mr. Pillman."

2) "Why, yes, I am a real lumberjack."

1) "My name is Gordon Solie and I want you to have my baby."

Top Ten Commercials Most Likely To Be Sponsored By A Wrestler... (Brian Heffron)

10) H-n-R Block by I.R.S.

9) Life Alert by Harley Race.

8) Van Halen Album by Van Hammer

7) Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires by Chip the Firebreaker.

6) Dial an Insult by Jim Cornette.

5) Nutri/System (before and after shots) by Dusty Rhodes and Dustin Rhodes.

4) Dark & Lovely by Johnny B. Badd.

3) Super Mario World by Big Bully Busich.

2) Red Cross Blood Bank by Cactus Jack.

1) Top Job by Terrance Taylor.

Top Ten Least Likely Wrestler Endorsements... (Robert Lee Solari)

10) Steve Lambardi for Gillette Razors.

9) Cactus Jack for Brooks Brothers.

8) Missy Hyatt for Trojan.

7) Hacksaw Duggan for Bauch & Lomb.

6) Lightning Kid for Nutri/System.

5) Dusty Rhodes for GNC (General Nutrition Centers).

4) Sid Justice for Easton (oops, wrong category).

3) Ted DiBiase for UNICEF.

2) Mel Phillips for Boys Club of America.

1) Hulk Hogan for "High Times."

Top Ten Things I Would Like To See Before I Give Up Watching Wrestling... (Robert Lee Solari)

10) A Typhoon Moonsault.

9) Ultimate Warrior Wrestle a 40-Minute Match and Then Do An Arn Anderson Interview Afterward.

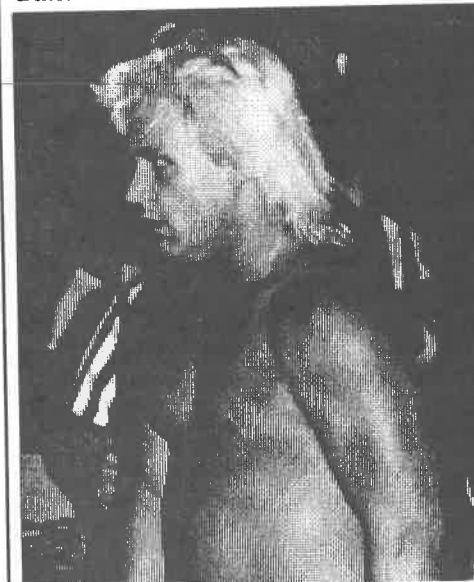
8) Warlord Becoming the Main Star of New Japan, Drawing Record Crowds on Just his Wrestling Talent Alone.

7) A News Conference Announcing a Joint WCW-WWF-USWA-SMW supercard.

6) Lightning Kid Beating Hulk Hogan.

5) Dusty Rhodes Has An Affair with Eddie Elner of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*.

4) Buddy Landell Going A Year Straight Without Missing One Booking Date.



BUDDY LANDELL (Photo by Wade Keller)

3) One Whole WCW Card With All Clean Pinfall Finishes.

2) Boy Wonder Winning the WCW, U.S., and World Titles the Same Night and then Badmouthing his Father (The Bull!@#\$ of the Woods) for Never Helping His Career.

1) Vince McMahon Retires From Wrestling, Gives All His Money To Charity, and Joins the Monks (Tibetan Sports?).

ALL-TIME FAVORITES

Torch Readers Discuss Their All-Time Favorite Wrestlers

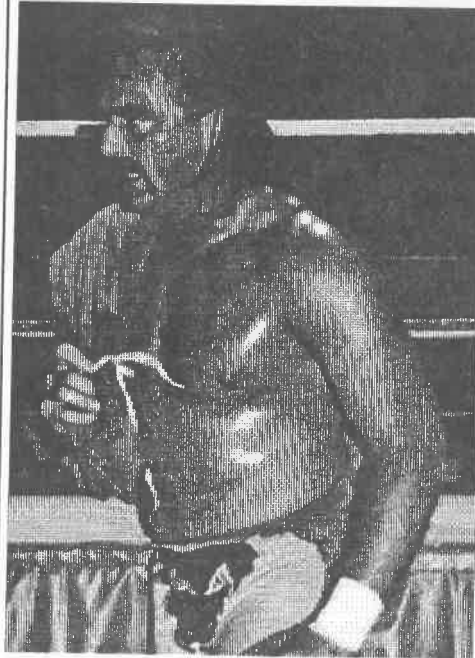
By The Torch Readers

Anthony Lucisano (Seaford, N.Y.): There are many wrestlers in the business today whose work I enjoy. These people include wrestlers such as Cactus Jack, Arn Anderson, Rick Rude, Arn Anderson, Bobby Eaton, Stan Lane, Curt Hennig, Roddy Piper, Steve Williams, and Terry Gordy, and newcomers such as Steve Austin and Johnny B. Badd. All of these men are consummate professionals, mixing their ring work with great interviews, able to carry even the most worthless opponents to a good match, and putting the same worthless opponents over if that is what is asked of them. The top of my list has remained unchanged since the day I saw Florida Championship Wrestling on a late Monday Night in 1983. "2001" blared as I saw Ric Flair for the first time as he "Went to school" on some poor jobber. Who is a better worker in the sport today? Even more so, who else is the biggest smart ass when giving interviews? Who else draws heat like he does? One "Whoool!" and the whole arena reacts! No one is like him and will never be like him, and just like Dusty Rhodes could not screw him up, Vince McMahon will fail in his attempt to tarnish the career of the "Nature Boy," because as the story goes, diamonds are forever, and so is Ric Flair.

Betty Schaffer: Jake "The Snake" Roberts is my all-time favorite wrestler. Over the years, he has proven to be a great worker through his good physical abilities and intense personality. His DDT is second to none and his sense of timing is perfect.

He entered the WWF as a heel, was turned into a face, and then back into a heel. It seems ironic that Jake could be cheered by thousands as a good guy while having a

snake as a mascot. It is hard to picture Damien as the name of a pet of a good guy. This all attests to Jake's enormous popularity.



JAKE ROBERTS

When I think of some of the highlights of Jake Roberts's career I recall his heated feuds with Rick Rude and Rick Martel, although I thought the blindfold match at Wrestlemania VII was the worst match on the card. I think of Earthquake squashing Damien. I will never forget the agony on Jake's face as he looked on helplessly trapped in the ropes. Jake saying "Trust me" to the Ultimate Warrior or anyone else sends shivers through me.

Dan Macosko (McKeesrocke, Pa.): This is a toss-up between Ric Flair and

Roddy Piper. Flair for ability, workrate, and a believable character, but I would have to give Piper the edge simply because he brings back fond memories of excitement and comedy. From back in I believe early-'83 when I first got TBS added to my cable, I saw Piper feuding as a face against Buzz Sawyer on Georgia Championship Wrestling. I saw him do such things as jump out of a lake from under the water ala Jason from Friday the 13th, smash a bottle over his own forehead, and hang himself from a tree. Who can forget the dog collar bloodbath with Greg Valentine? When Piper entered the WWF he was the hottest heel commodity, from Piper managing Orndorff and Schults, along with his wrestling, and of course Piper's Pit. The Snuka and Frankie Williams classic Pit. The Halloween Saturday Night's Main Event where he gave out chocolate bricks and candy apple bowling balls. The Scottish torture hammer. The classic MTV "Rock and Wrestling Connection" against Hogan leading to Wrestlemania. Piper played the heel role to the hilt. The "Flower Shop" babyface turn. Even today, Piper has always been enjoyable to watch.

Andy Stowell (Pittsburgh, Pa.): In the early-80s, the only show in town was the WWF. It was on WPTT, a local independent on a weak UHF station that even looked cruddy on our cable system. I watched it religiously but never really developed a favorite wrestler. In 1985, right after the first Wrestlemania, Vince McMahon maneuvered the WWF of WPTT in favor of WTAE, the higher rated ABC affiliate. In place of the defecting WWF, the UHF station started running World Class Championship Wrestling.

Being a poor college freshman at the time, I could not afford to go to the live matches, or even buy the magazines, but I used to read them at the newsstand waiting for the bus. I knew who the Von Erichs were, and I knew about Kerry beating Ric Flair for the NWA belt the year before, but past that, I had no idea about any of the wrestlers in World Class. I actually missed the first show, but made sure I was home the next week just to see what it was like. The opening graphics were really interesting and I liked that they ran main event matches since I was used to a steady diet of squashes on the WWF show. I remember Kerry Von Erich was in the main event in a tag team match against One Man



RODDY PIPER

Gang. But what really got my attention was the angle where Sunshine had her man, Hercules Hernandez, fighting "Gorgeous" Gino Hernandez. Gino was okay, but what stopped my heart was when the other half of the Dynamic Duo, "Gentleman" Chris Adams, hit the ring. After a quick flurry, Adams nailed Hercules Hernandez with his superkick. At the time, I thought that was the most devastating maneuver I had ever seen. Hercules was lying on the mat unconscious. Gino and Chris went to town on Sunshine until her other man, the Great Kabuki, ran in for the save. I was hooked.

The next couple of weeks featured matches from the second Parade of Champions. I remember the match where Kevin Von Erich beat up Ric Flair, but I could not figure out why Flair was the heel (at the time, Mid-Atlantic had starting running their program on another UHF station in town and Flair was feuding with Wahoo McDaniel and Tully Blanchard. At the time, I did not like Mid-Atlantic and only watched it sporadically). The match between Gino & Chris vs. Kabuki & someone was kind of lackluster. What excited me was the 12 man match where the Von Erichs teamed up with the Freebirds to fight Chris & Gino along with Kimala, One Man Gang, Steve Williams, and The Missing Link. The match was okay, but the best part was after the match when Chris and Gino destroyed the car Kevin had just won. That was exciting.

The rest of the summer, Chris and Gino defended the tag team titles beating everybody in the area. It was great stuff. I was in a musical that summer and a lot of the guys were hooked on the WWF or the NWA show, but I kept telling them they had to see the "crazy Texas show!" By the end of summer, everyone was watching World Class.

In August they started hyping the hair vs. hair match between the Duo and the Von Erichs. For weeks, I was excited about Kerry and Kevin getting their heads shaved, figuring there was no way Chris Adams would get beat. The day the match was on TV was homecoming at Carnegie Mellon, but I skipped all of the festivities,



TULLY BLANCHARD

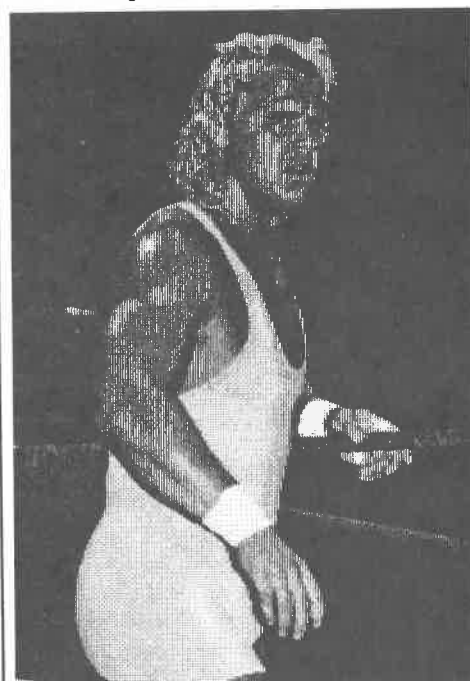
getting ready for the match. Of course, Kevin pinned Chris and I sat in shock as Chris and Gino were shaved bald. I could not believe there was not a heel who would help them!

A couple months later Chris turned babyface and feuded with Gino. During their first match, Chris was "blinded" by Gino and had to leave the area. This was on the same show where they announced Gino's death which was by drug overdose. After that, I really did not watch World Class closely, but I would always check in to see if Adams had returned. The magazines kept talking about Adams "regaining his sight" and that he would be back someday.

Finally, in late-April, they announced on World Class that Adams was returning. The whole week I was distracted at school wondering about whether Adams would return as a heel or a face. I was all set and come 4 p.m. there was no World Class! Verne Gagne had bought out the slot and they were running the AWA. I called the station only to be told that WCCW had been cancelled and replaced by the AWA. I was, to say the least, quite pissed.

By July, WCCW was back on and I got to see Adams pin Rick Rude to win the World Class Heavyweight Title but they did not end up doing much with him as champion and the show went downhill. I remember watching the episode where they announced that NWA prelim wrestler Black Bart beat Adams "in California," so I stopped watching WCCW. Besides, Roddy Piper had just turned face and Titan was doing much better television. Then the UWF came on and that became my favorite show with Chris Adams teaming with Terry Taylor as UWF Champs. Of course, the station cancelled the UWF in April, 1987. But then the NWA's "Great American Bash" came to town and I got to see Adams live for the first time. Most of the crowd was dead for his tag match, but I was up in the middle section, the lone nut screaming my head off for Chris Adams.

I haven't heard much of Adams lately as he seems to have disappeared in the Texas independents. The last I saw of him



CURT HENNIG

was on a Galavision EMLL show last September, feuding with Kevin Von Erich again, telling the people of Mexico to go suck eggs. You know, as bad as American wrestling has become in the last couple of years, I am glad that my all time favorite, the Gentleman from England, is still the same.

Joe Margosian (Racine, Wisc.): My family never cared for wrestling, so I was not weaned on it as many current fans were. I discovered it entirely on my own. And from the first time I viewed it in the late-50s I was so intrigued by the combatants that I immediately became enraptured with the sport. My memory fails me as to what that first match was and who the grapplers were, but at that first glance, I was hooked. Maybe it was something in my DNA, but this was something I had to have.

I began by watching the AWA studio shows in the early-60s on Saturday afternoons which were exciting, but left me wanting more. As a young adolescent with no money to speak of and no adults around who cared about wrestling to take me to the bouts, I just had to be patient until I became an adult to see the major matches live and in-person.

After a few years of viewing the AWA shows, a local Chicago station began airing house shows a few weeks after they had taken place live from the Chicago Amphitheater. The show ran from 12 midnight until 3 or 4 a.m. With the rest of my family sleeping, I could watch the matches in peace. I usually passed out around 2 a.m. It was great. I saw the likes of the Grahams, Bobo Brazil, the Original Sheik, Dick the Bruiser, Sailor Art Thomas, Bearcat Wright, Wilbur Snyder, Moose Cholak, Haystacks Calhoun, and others. I was enthralled by the large crowds who were basically male and adult. And they were quiet for the most part cheering only when the action warranted it. They were not quiet because they were disinterested. On the contrary, they were quiet because they were interested. They were very studious and took their wrestling seriously. This was indeed an underground subculture that I longed to be part of.

Then one night I saw him. Buddy Rogers! Who was this guy? Where did he come from? Look at that strut! Many have since tried to emulate the strut and some came close, but I have yet to see anyone get

it exactly right. An exaggerated, cocky, self-assured, I'm king-of-the-hills truth. Wow, the fans became vociferous, booing him loudly. I loved it. From the beginning I always rooted for the heels which was my own little rebellion against the masses whom I continue to dislike to this very day. I saw Rogers wrestle on three occasions. The program went off the air sometime in the early-60s and I did not have the *Torch* or *Observer* to tell me why. Although I kept up with Rogers's career through the print media, I never saw him wrestle again until I purchased various tapes of him in the late-80s. One of my biggest regrets is that I was too young and too late to see him wrestle live. What a thrill that would have been. From time to time, I view his matches on tape and I rediscover and marvel at his great athletic ability and talent.

Throughout his life, in the ring and out, Herman Rhode exuded class and dignity. While I had and have other heroes in this sport, Rogers was and will remain my "god of wrestling." And as Buddy would so often say, this honor that I bestowed upon him "couldn't have happened to a greater guy."

I am truly sorry that the man did not get to read this and realize how much I admired him. He was so vibrant, I always thought there was time to write him and perhaps to meet him one day. Time is short, time is precious, let us all remember that each and every day.

Adam Kaine (Farmington Hills, Mich.): I have always been a big fan of Curt Hennig. I loved when he entered the WWF and they showed him doing everything perfectly. This man is a true professional especially his last match at SummerSlam '91. The WWF has not had a card worth seeing since he left with a back injury. He has the perfect build, sleek as a gazelle. His technical skills and exaggerated falls have brought joy to thousands of hardcore fans.

This man can also draw major heat at an arena. I once took my brother to a card that had a Perfect vs. Bulldog match. A female fan reacted toward Hennig as if he had dumped her, took all of her money and her poodle. This woman reached decibels that would put an opera star like Marian Anderson to shame. My brother stayed at the concourse for the remaining two matches.

I wish Hennig would leave the WWF for the Dangerous Alliance when he

becomes healthy. It would be great to see him team up with Rick Rude and have potential feuds with the Steiners or a Steamboat and Windham.

The afternoon before Survivor Series in Detroit, Hennig made a radio appearance at WLLZ in my hometown of Farmington Hills. I am currently going to Eastern Michigan University and I had a major test that night. I was so angry Hennig was three minutes from my apartment and I could not meet him.

I am not one of those autograph seekers, I just wanted to say thanks for all of the enjoyable hours I have spent watching his matches and following his career. Hopefully by Wrestlemania IX, Curt Hennig will be proclaimed the perfect WWF Heavyweight Champion.



DICK THE BRUISER (Photo by Gary Kamensack)

Rich Tito (Chicago, Ill.): It was 1966 and all the kids in 7th grade were talking about this maniac wrestler on TV who destroyed chairs, sets, and wrestlers every Sunday morning on the old Big Time Wrestling show hosted by Chuck Marlowe out of Indy. He was Dick the Bruiser, who at the time was an unbelievable madman who was feuding with the likes of Wilbur Snyder, Johnny Valentine, and Pat O'Connor.

His matches at the old Amphitheatre were always great. Although he slowed down later, in his prime I believe there were not any better performers.

Andi Brugioni (Des Moines, Iowa): Curt "Wrestling Personified" Hennig has the most original and charismatic wrestling moves ever. He combines his own scientific skills with the influence of his brawling father and then manages to make all the male wrestling fans I know grind their teeth in a jealous rage. Simply put, Hennig's bumps and begging for mercy make the others look better than what they really are. I hate to upset the apple cart, but Hennig is the real man who can beat the man and he should then teach Undertaker a lesson so that Calloway becomes a wrestler again instead of a fool. Incredible showoffmanship and more than simple words can describe.

Bobby Yates (Asheboro, N.C.): I can't say who my all-time favorite wrestler is because if I did you would have another essay on Ric Flair. But I can say my favorite combination is the Fabulous Freebirds. I never had the privilege of seeing the good old days in Mid-South and Georgia, but I read about them in newsstand magazines. My first glimpse was of them destroying Junkyard Dog & Tommy Rich. I finally got to see World Class and I knew what was really causing all the commotion. I was the only person I knew who liked them or even knew who they were. They were disappointing in the WWF, but that was not their fault.

Their days in the AWA were as if they were in a rest period before and after World Class. It was great seeing Hayes & Gordy against Sting & Rick Steiner back in 1987. Great interviews are abundant with the Birds. The Birds are at their best fighting each other. Iceman Parsons was even pretty good, rooty poot and all.

Anyone who knows me knows my dedication to the memory of the Four Horsemen and Midnight Express. My loyalty was questioned when they fought the Freebirds.

No, I'm not a redneck, I don't praise Lynnyrd Skynnyrd, and I definitely don't have a confederate flag hanging with my Quebec, USSR, and New Zealand flags (wrestling props). I am a little disappointed with Hayes & Garvin's recent work, but what have they got to work for? Misuse? Neglect?

David Engebretson (Mount Prospect, Ill.): Green Bay, Wisc. is where the Packers play football. Next to Curly Lambeau Field



"FREEBIRD" MICHAEL HAYES (Photo by Wade Keller)

on Vince Lombardi Avenue, stands the Green Bay Packer Hall of Fame. The story of one of the NFL's oldest franchises is told in trophies, video tapes, and equipment from throughout their history on display.

Late this past spring, I stared at these pictures, with specific intent. Sure enough, there he was, in each photo from each of these teams with twice the chest-width of any other player. A goofy grin, with both front teeth missing. Richard Afflis, offensive tackle. Trade the football uniform for a matches set of black tights and boots, and before you is Dick the Bruiser, the World's Most Dangerous Wrestler.

One anomaly of the Packers photos is that Afflis's uniform number changed in each picture. Perhaps this was an attempt to conceal his identity from their opponents from year to year. It is delicious to speculate that he played so rough and dirty that his number was changed to deflect retribution from other teams. As the Bears and Packers lined up to rumble in 1953, you can just hear one Bear player say to another...

"Boy, I'm glad they got rid of #68! He was rough!"

Yes he was.

Dick the Bruiser stood tall over the Midwest wrestling scene from the '60s into the late-'70s. He was always "The Man," although he rarely held a singles belt. He was the focal point of the action, from Denver to Detroit, from Green Bay to Indianapolis.

There has never been a wrestler who better defines the concept of "brawler" than The Bruiser. He had three basic moves: 1)

Grab the ear, punch the face; 2) the "mule kick" when he was bent over in the corner; and 3) jumping off the second rope, stomping his opponent's stomach for the finisher. On occasion, he would put his competition away with an under-the-ring cage clawhold. At this point, he does not sound much more interesting than watching the Ultimate Warrior, does he? But the Bruiser had the stamina to sustain long brawls against the best in the business. The standard Bruiser non-squash match consisted of Dick being beaten, particularly if it was a two-out-of-three falls affair, and then battling back to even the score. And always, the juice, the precious juice.

Bob Luce was the wrestling promoter in the Chicago area during the Bruiser's heyday. Luce would pack the Amphitheater on a monthly basis, generally with the Bruiser on top. At a match I attended, 20,000 plus maniacs screamed "We Want Blood!" as the Bruiser and his clone, The Crusher, fought Nick Bockwinkel & "The Bumpmaster General" Ray Stevens for their AWA Tag Team straps. No one was disappointed when Crusher & Bruiser bloodied and defeated their opponents, gaining the championship. Even Bobby Heenan got into the fun, taking his customary flip-over backwards from a punch bump, and his pre-Flair upside down and over the turnbuckles pirouette.

Since his untimely demise this past spring, some critics have written that Dick the Bruiser did not "sell," and therefore was not a good in-ring performer. I beg to differ. The Bruiser was the best professional wrestler to perform in the Midwest marketplace during this era, because he put butts in seats. Over 20,000 people witnessed the 1972 Soldier Field spectacular, with Bruiser, Crusher, Blackjacks Mulligan & Lanza, Bobby Heenan, and "Jersey Joe" Walcott in the cage main event. They drew 20,000-plus to a show run by a promotion with a one-hour TV show on an obscure UHF channel at 12 noon on Sundays. Charisma draws fans, and the Bruiser was over-stocked in this department. The fans could believe in him, that he was truly tough.

The booking scheme of this promotion always gave the new heel the opportunity for a build-up before his titanic encounter with Dick the Bruiser. Often, arena matches were shown on TV where

the Bruiser was pinned, although always with some form of screw-job or interference that caused Afflis to fall. This would whet the fans' interest, and get them into the arenas. Could this new behemoth actually defeat the mighty Bruiser? Often, during these set-ups, Bruiser would blade gloriously, and howl for his future revenge, at the up-coming Amphitheater show, of course.

During successive summers in the late-'70s, Bob Luce brought in three contenders to take on the Bruiser in Chicago. Ox Baker, Bruiser Brody, and Crusher Blackwell each ran the summertime Bruiser gauntlet. There were three matches each summer, with a predictable storyline. Match one, the Bruiser would be pummelled and some countout would result. Gee, maybe this new guy can beat the King of the Hill. Match two, basically even, with another inconclusive climax. There is only one way to settle this, Bob Luce would scream, "Bring on the cage!" with predictable results. Indeed, this booking technique may have been phoned in, and none of the men involved will ever be mentioned in the same breath as Jushin Liger, as far as wrestling moves go. However, the intensity of these matches was unbelievable. To watch the Bruiser and Brody literally hammer each other for over 45 minutes, non-stop, made me think that maybe wrestling was real, at least when those two went at it.

It seems that many athletes do not quit when they should or when they must. I last saw the Bruiser live when he and the Crusher wrestled The Road Warriors at the Rosemont Horizon in the early-80s. Although there was a countout finish, it was obvious that the old guard was out-powered and outclassed by this new, alien breed of musclemen. The end of an era was before my eyes.

Dick the Bruiser, legendary performer, is no longer with us. A childhood—and honestly an adult—idol of mine has moved on, never to dance for us again.

If you are ever in Green Bay, stop in at the Hall of Fame. You will see the Starrs, Kramers, Davises, and the other greats from the Packers glory days. And make sure you check out the photo wall. To wrestling fans, Richard Afflis is the most famous Packer of them all.

David J. Engebretson (Mount

Prospect, Ill.): During the late-'60s and early-'70s, a main event attraction in the Atlanta NWA area was Doug Gilbert, "The Masked Professional."

He was bulky without a well-defined build. Yet Gilbert was incredibly coordinated with the best mat moves of any professional wrestler I have ever seen. He was the largest man I have ever seen perform a kip-up. He used the standard moves, but had stylized, personal versions of armlocks and hip tosses. He sold well, could go thirty-plus minutes, and understood how to tell a story in the ring. His stick work was very straight-forward, serious, and realistic. He maintained his quiet, steely charisma with or without the head bag, and did not change his tune during his bi-annual heel-face flip. He personified his gimmick, "The Professional."

Gilbert thrived in a small ensemble cast, which relied on the Assassins, El Mongol, Paul DeMarco, Dale Lewis, Joe Scarpa (Jay Strongbow), Dandy Jack Crawford, the Vachon Brothers, and periodic injections of short-term talent like Nick Bockwinkel & Bobby Heenan, The Crusher, and Mr. Wrestling I (Tim Woods). This group managed to sell out the old Atlanta City Auditorium every single Friday night for years and years, and received high ratings for their "Live Atlanta Wrestling" Saturday TV show. "The Pro" was always in the thick of things, holding the Georgia Heavyweight, TV, or Georgia Tag Titles at any given time.

The Paul Jones's NWA operation was very successful at the time. Their tremendous heat was sustained through creatively booking the use of the mask gimmicks between The Professional and The Assassins, tornado matches, and the judicious application of turns. The Professional was the recognized cream of the local crop, and always was challenged by the travelling wrestlers and champions. Living up to his namesake, Gilbert often "did the job" for the likes of Bockwinkel, then the AWA champion.

I saw Doug Gilbert perform many times at the City Auditorium (during one match, an overheated fan pulled a small caliber automatic and emptied it at the ring), but the best match involving the Professional happened on "Live Atlanta Wrestling." A new, mysterious masked man challenged The Professional at the podium, and Gilbert, as Georgia Champ,

took him up on it. They wrestled a close, tough match. The newcomer was large, talented, but seemed uncomfortable with the mask on and repeatedly jumped from the ring and adjusted his mask, right in front of the camera. Talk about a tease. Finally, The Professional pins the stranger, and jerks the loser's mask off. My God, it is Gene Kiniski, NWA World Champion. What a build up to their suddenly announced title fight the upcoming Friday! This was masterful booking. Where are such artists today?

Let's face facts, pro wrestling was more realistic, and hence more entertaining, than it is in the dismal '90s. Even when compared to his peers, many of whom were highly-skilled, Doug Gilbert had it all. He possessed the stamina, moves, and dramatic abilities that would favorably compare to the Ric Flair of the late-'80s. Last seen in a referee's shirt on some obscure AWA TV card from the mid-'80s, one can only speculate whether Gilbert reached his desired pinnacle during his career.

Robert Lee Solari II (Detroit, Mich.): My favorite wrestler is Bill Mulkey. My favorite "star" wrestler is a tie between Road Warrior Animal and Steve Williams, but my heart goes out to Billy M. and his brother Randy because they have made a career of jobbing. A jobber's job is extremely important. He has to really convey the superiority of his foe. The jobber has to be beaten badly in the process of putting the other guy over. Some guys lose but do not have any style about it. Take Chris Frasier in the USWA. He just waits to get hit and just lays down on the canvas. A jobber should have the fan excited when he comes into the ring, because they know they are about to see the total destruction of a man complete with hellacious bumps. Bill Mulkey is the ultimate at his craft. Need someone to be powerbombed through the mat? Bill's the man. Need someone to be press-slammed into space?

One match stands out in my mind. For about two or three weeks, this match was the introduction for NWA World Wide Wrestling. Bill and his brother were facing Road Warrior Animal. In the 20-25 seconds the match took, a work of art happened. The Mulkeys succeeded in conveying Animal's power to the max along with being double-pinned and giving the Roadie a chance to mug for the TV camera.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

The Torch Readers Reflect on Their Favorite Memories as Fans

By The Torch Readers

Dan Macosko (McKeesrock, Pa.): One of my fondest memories in wrestling was back in early 1981. Sgt. Slaughter as a heel in the WWF had the cobra clutch challenge, offering \$5000 to anyone who could break the hold. Each week he taunted commentator Pat Patterson finally offering \$10,000 along with a slap to Pat's face. In dress clothes, Pat flipped off the turnbuckle, flipped over again, and rammed Slaughter face-first into the buckle, with Slaughter holding on all the while. Then Pat slowly worked his free arm between Slaughter's arms, breaking the



SGT. SLAUGHTER

hold. Slaughter went berserk, decking Patterson with a wooden folding chair busting him open. Then he threw the referee out and beat on Patterson until the faces made the save. Also, the fans were shown in slow motion while chanting

"Gomer, Gomer." My brother-in-law and I were rolling on the floor with laughter, our family thinks we were crazy to be amused by something so silly such as wrestling, to them just fake nonsense. Having marital problems, Tony overdosed on pills and alcohol that following August, an apparent suicide. He was my best friend at the time, but thinking back on that laughter we shared always helps ease the pain of his death. Recently I obtained the incident on video through tape trading, and I know if Tony was still here he would be watching it and laughing right along with me. Despite all the recent accusations against Patterson, whether true or not, this incident will always be a part of my enjoyment of wrestling.

Betty Schaffer (Baltimore, Md.): One of my most memorable moments as a wrestling fan is the first live card I attended. I became a wrestling fan several years ago as an adult, so I don't have the fond childhood memories that some have and I missed a lot of great wrestling years. I have read as much about the two decades of wrestling that I missed as I can get my hands on. All of this leads me to one of my most outstanding wrestling memories. It was only a little more than a year and a half ago that I got to attend my first live wrestling event. I was like a kid in a candy store and I hope that a little bit of that feeling stays with me always as a wrestling fan.

It was a cool night and I was psyched up for it. I was fascinated with the arena, the vendors, and the fans. I wanted to see if they were the wild group that I had heard. Actually we wrestling fans are from diverse backgrounds and are united by our love of

this sport and all this was before the event started. It was a WCW show and it was very good. I saw some of the best in the business, most notably Ric Flair, the Steiners, and Buddy Landel. I remember feeling the strong ring presence of Ric Flair and how the crowd cheered the Steiners and the team of Doom. I enjoyed every second of the show.

I have vivid memories of after the show watching for the wrestlers to leave the arena. I remember the Nasty Boys booing and shouting at the fans from a car. A security guard came out and told us everyone had left. The fans knew this was a play, but waited a little and then started our journey home. As I was walking to my car, Ric Flair's limo passed by. I enjoyed the big and the little moments of that evening. I have tried to keep a little of that child-like amazement even though I am an adult fan. Sometimes it is too easy to overlook some of the small joys that make wrestling fun. I have enjoyed every live event that I have attended and I hope that I will enjoy events in the future just as much.

Ron Valim: In June of 1976, The Royal Kangaroos, Lord Jonathan Boyd and his cousin Norma Fredrick Charles III came to wrestle in the San Francisco area. They were really terrific villains, getting the fans riled up.

They had been wrestling in the area for about a month when they made their first appearance in Santa Rosa at the Vet's Building on July 9th. A group of us decided to go there and cheer for the Kangaroos. We got a white cloth and using marking pens made a flag of Australia. We also used cardboard and cut out boomerangs.

Since you can sit anywhere you want, we took aisle seats near the villains entrance. As the Kangaroos came to ring, about 98 percent of the 250 fans were loudly booing them. The five of us held the flag and boomerangs and the Royal ones smiled at us. A few times during the match they looked over at us and we held the flag up proudly. They easily disposed of Tony Garea and Jerry Monti. On their way back to the dressing rooms both Boyd and Charles stopped and shook hands with us! Of course, we were not popular with the fans that night and we almost got into a fight with some other fans after the card was over. It was fun to be booed at like the wrestlers, but I would not do it at the Cow Palace. Too many crazy fans with weapons.

Somebody: The Nassau Coliseum on Long Island has been a source of live wrestling for many years, and has brought about many funny incidents that are worth mentioning. One exceptionally humorous time was when Mr. Fuji did his traditional salt throwing before a match. I was sitting in the first row near his corner and received a healthy shower of salt. As displeased I was with this, the big dude next to me appreciated the gesture even less, as he proceeded to hop the railing, run in the ring, and bodyslam Fuji! He then returned to his seat without actions being taken and received the biggest pop of the night.

The funniest instance was when I was at a WWF card and watched in perplexity as my friend, adorned in a Four Horsemen t-shirt, was hassled by WWF road agents because he was in the front row and the matches were being taped, and was threatened with being ejected if he would not wear a "Hulk Rules" t-shirt. Reservedly, he wore the shirt, but repeatedly lifted the shirt when the camera passed, much to our enjoyment and the chagrin of the road agents.

Another great time was July 1991 at the kickoff of the Great American Bash, and the time we also found that Ric Flair was no longer with WCW. I did not believe it until Capetta remarked over the p.a. that Flair was gone. We had mentioned to those around us about the real reason Flair was out and later during the matches, the whole damn arena was screaming "We Want Flair!" much to the chagrin of those in the WarGames. Even more humorous was that John Arezzi had taped it and played it during the opening of his Pro Wrestling Spotlight radio show... Geez, I still cannot believe it has been a year already.

David Engebretson (Mr. Prospect, III.): There have been many and ridiculous moments during my 30-plus year fascinations with professional wrestling. The following are the highlights:

1) **Front Row Fracas:** At the Omni in Atlanta, at some dim point in the late-'70s, Dusty Rhodes drove the "Original" Sheik's head into my chair... my very chair! What an honor. I wore a stupid grin and beer-splash on my shirt for the rest of the night. I am not sure if Big Dusty booked his own finishes then, but as expected, this match ended in a screwjob.

2) **Big Money:** I attended Starrcade in 1987 at the Pavilion in Chicago, which

featured Flair vs. Ron Garvin, NWA Champion, in the cage. With me was a friend, who simply would not believe that Garvin could lose. He wanted to bet on the outcome of the title match. It cost him \$50 for the privilege of seeing the Nature Boy regain what is always rightfully his to hold. Even before I started reading wrestling newsletters, I just knew that Ron Garvin and "Heavyweight Champion" did not belong in the same sentence.

3) **Reality Check:** While in college, my frat brothers and I would get tickets for the matches at the Atlanta City Auditorium on Friday nights. Before there were ticket services, you called to reserve seats, and then went to the wrestling office to pick them up. My friend Mike and I went to get our tickets at the old Paul Jones Wrestling offices one day, so we paid for the seats, we noticed a very large black man sitting on top of a desk, wearing a deodara and smoking a cigar. Mike said, "That's Abdullah the Butcher!" I was crestfallen. He looked almost normal. Maybe this "from the Sudan" stuff is just a clever ploy?

4) **Medical Assistance:** Say what you will about Ole Anderson, the heat in the Omni in Atlanta during the 70s was incredible. Big houses, lots of heat, impressive matches. At some show during this period, "Maniac" Mark Lewin was destroying some face, perhaps Paul Jones. At the climax of the match, Lewin was handed a wire clothes hanger by Gary Hart and wrapped it around the face's neck, who held his breath to get the proper red-faced reaction. After the heels had cleared out, the referee grabbed the house mic and cried.

"Is there a doctor in the house?"

Really, it does not get any better than that, does it?

5) **Septuagenarian Abuse:** As a youth, I may have indulged in more brain stimulants than was prudent, therefore, some memories are more concise than others. However, I cast this question out to those fans who followed 1970s Atlanta NWA wrestling. I seem to recall a segment where Nick Bockwinkel had a jobber in the figure-four, and would not let go. Bobby Heenan jumped in the ring, and egged him on. Mr. Wrestling II jumped into the ring and cleaned house of the heels. He then punched out Gordon Solie, almost as a reflex reaction. They cut to commercial and it was never mentioned again.

...And let us not forget Roddy Piper's



NICK BOCKWINKEL (Photo by Wade Keller)

videos, where he would reach into the cooler in the back of his vintage pickup truck, firmly grasp an ice-cold Miller High Life, and smash the bottle over his own head...

The reasons I always watched wrestling when I was a kid were that it always had the potential of bizarre behavior by the players, and was only on once a week. If you did not see it, you missed out. I hope that some day quality pro wrestling will return and I will be as excited about it as I once was.

Lenis Sargent (Gainsville, Ga.): It was the summer of 1973 at the very hot and muggy Northeast, Ga. Fairgrounds in Gainesville, Ga. The card was the All-South Promotion with the main event being El Mongol vs. Ox Baker. They had fought more times than memory allows me to remember, but this match was particularly brutal. I can remember Ox fighting Mongol with a chair around his neck and blood all over him and Mongol as Mongol was bloody himself. But that was not the most memorable thing that happened that night. I have always been a big autograph hound and continue to be one to this day. One autograph that I have always wanted but have yet to get is Abby's. I still have a problem asking him for his as I am literally afraid that he will either eat my book or tear it to shreds. But this night I got up the nerve to get another autograph I had always

wanted, that being big Ox Baker's, the Abby of the '70s here in Gainesville. Ox came out of the dressing room with Oki Shikini and Ox had that big cigar hanging out of his mouth and a huge bandage on his forehead. I went over to ask him for his autograph and he kindly stopped and signed it as all of my friends stood back and watched. He then handed me back my autograph book and said in that scratchy voice, "Here you go kid. Now go and sell it for \$5.00 and buy yourself a damn good steak!"

Another incident that comes to mind is in January of 1991 in Tokyo's Korakuen Hall. It was after a brutal card of FMW where Bobby Yates and I had almost gotten run over by Pogo and Onita in one of their particularly brutal matches. After the matches we all got to go back to the dressing room and take pics of one of Onita's "crying" press conferences which was a sight to see. After that, we got to hang out with Despina Montegas and Tarzan Gotoah, Mike Awesome (aka The Gladiator), and Victor Quennoises. As everyone started clearing out Steve Gerber and I were the only fans left in the dressing rooms. We had no idea how to get out, so Mike and Victor told us to hold on and they would walk us to the elevator. We were walking down the hall and talking with Mike and he was very open and easy to talk to. We got to a long hallway and there were probably ten or so fans at the end of the hall and as we approached them, Mike Awesome went into The Gladiator "mode" and yelled at the kids telling them, "Get the hell outta here you little punks, go on get the hell outta here NOW!" and waving his bag at them. I was about to crack up as these little kids were literally crashing into one another to get out of his way. We walked a little piece on down the hall and got to the elevator and there were some more kids and this time adults waiting to get on the elevator and he did it again and again, they being terrified of his presence, scurried out of his way.

Needless to say, we got on the elevator alone as they were not about to get on the same elevator with Mike, and as the door shut, Mike said, "Damn, I love this job!" and Victor replied, "You better be glad this is Japan, because if this were the States, you would get the shit sued out of you for stuff like that," with a smile.

David Savko (Pittsburgh, Pa.): I have

two things that stand out from the rest. First, one was in April 1987 when we went to the NWA Crockett Cup Tag Team Tournament in Baltimore. After the show we went to the bar at the Marriott. The Four Horsemen were at the bar drinking. I walked up to Mr. Flair and asked him if I could buy him a drink. He said, "No



RIC FLAIR (Photo by Wade Keller)

thanks," then he pulled out a roll of \$100.00 and gave one to the bartender and said keep the drinks coming. But he never bought me one.

The second memorable moment was in April 1992 at Wrestlemania VIII. We were staying at the Omni hotel where the wrestlers were staying. I got on the elevator on the 6th floor to go down to the lobby. The door opened on the fourth floor and in walked Hulk Hogan, Randy Savage, and Elizabeth. They were getting ready to go over to the Hoosier Dome. I said, "Hello, how's it going, Mr Savage." I then asked if he was getting ready for his match and he said, "I'm as ready as I'm going to be." The door to the elevator opened on the second floor where they all got off. I said good luck and he thanked me.

Dave Frey (Marion, N.Y.): I became a pro wrestling fan for the same reason as many others: My parents were good fans, but unlike them, I always cheered for the heels, which upset my parents to no end. I remember one night in the late-50s when I was 9 or 10, my mother and I stayed up really late to watch a match from Winnipeg.

The reception was not really good as we were in Buffalo, but my favorite heel team, The Miller Brothers, were beating up a couple of faces. As I was in my glory cheering for the Millers, my mother turned to me and said with a dead straight face, "If you like those Millers so much, why don't you go and live with them!!?" I can still see her to this day.

Adam Kaine (Farmington Hills, Mich.): The first wrestling match I saw besides that old Bugs Bunny cartoon was "The War to Settle the Score" involving Hulk Hogan, Roddy Piper, and Cyndi Lauper on MTV. When I saw the show I became transfixed with what I saw. When I was growing up I was a big fan of the ABC cartoon Superfriends, especially the episodes featuring the Legion of Doom. The thing that hooked me to wrestling was that the cartoon superheroes could actually come to life. I guess you could say Bobby Heenan reminded me of Lex Luthor.

It took me almost five years to get some inside information to reeducate myself on the sport. I remember my first four years as a fan just watching the WWF. I thought that WCW was the minor leagues. I remember being bored by the Clash of the Champions. It is funny how times have changed now because I feel that the WWF is the one with the minor league product.

My mother told me about a wrestling column in the *Detroit News* by M.L. Curly in 1990. I went to the library and looked up all the articles he had written. I finally came across an address for the *Observer*. I really want to thank Jim Thompson for his wrestling column. I have had a great time meeting other hardcore fans and travelling from city to city to support national and independent promotions.

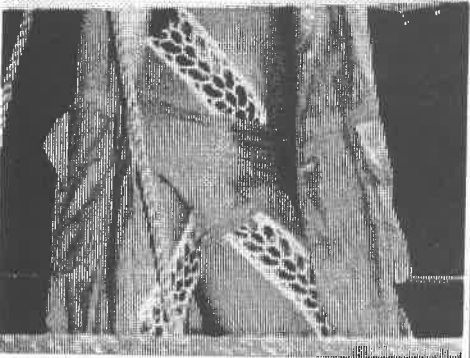
I have seen over 30 live wrestling shows since 1989 and here are some favorite moments. I saw Florida Championship show at the Eddie Graham Sports Arena in Orlando, Florida in December 1989. The arena was an outdoor stadium with a roof. It was about 30 degrees in Florida that night. Only about 50 fans were there. These wrestlers worked very hard to please the crowd.

A wrestler named Grizzly Bear weighed about 350 pounds and was drawing a lot of heat. This one fan was really ripping on Grizzly Bear. Bear took one look at this guy and said, "Hey, boy,

you have no teeth." In the following matches the other heels went right after this fan with verbal remarks. This fan did not say a word the rest of the night. The main event was Florida champion Steve "Gator" Keirn against Blackjack Mulligan. This match included a brawl with chairs and trash cans and Buggy McGraw made a run in. They all fought to the dressing room.

The first really big show that I saw was the Survivor Series in Detroit. I was amazed by the number of Undertaker fans that were there. It was really exciting being there but the show was terrible. I met many *Torch* and *Observer* readers that night. We even started a *Torch-Observer* chant like the "less filling, taste great" chant.

I met my first newsletter reader Steve Fischer at a WWF show. I normally sit ringside and during a Smash and Bulldog match, I started a chant of Repoman. This was about three months before Repoman



REPOMAN

finally appeared on TV, Fischer was on their side and we got a Repoman chant going. Smith and Darsow were laughing throughout the match.

I was one of 150 people to see the nearly five-star match reported by John Muse in the *Observer* between Scott "The Rock" Stevens at Irish Mickey Double at the Frazer Ice Arena in Frazer Michigan on May 30, 1992. This match was a Motor City taping.

This was a falls count everywhere match. Doyle juiced and both fought

everywhere in this ice arena. Stevens and Doyle threw trash cans, used chairs, both were thrown onto vans, the boards, and into hockey nets. Towards the end of the match, Stevens started up the Zamboni machine with Doyle on the ground looking unconscious. The crowd started chanting "Drive him over." These independent workers really know how to put on a show.

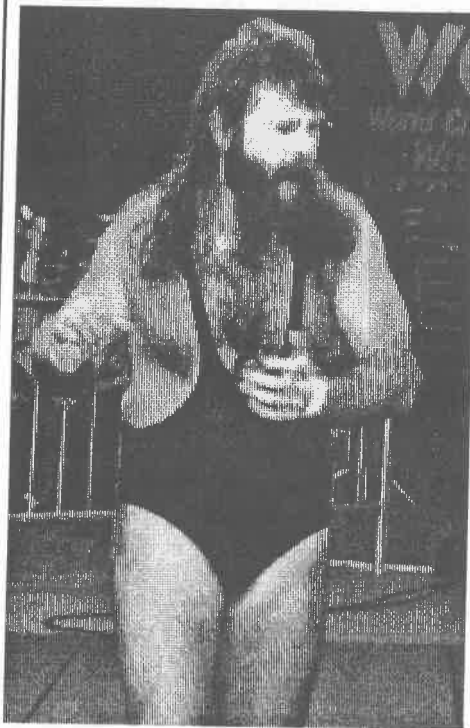
Robert Lee Solari III (Detroit, Mich.):

My most memorable moment as a wrestling fan came in November 1991. I was actually looking forward to the Survivor Series after suffering through countless Chris Walker vs. Warlord and Snuka vs. Barbarian type cards at the Palace in Auburn Hills. With this in mind, I went down to Joe Louis Arena to pick up my tickets. Anyway, I came into the Cobo Arena, which is next door. I ran into a friend of mine who works at the information booth in Cobo and a wrestling fan to boot, so we conversed a bit and then a familiar voice behind us asked how we could get over to Joe's locker rooms. And of all people, we ran into Jack Tunney. Since I had just started reading the *Torch* and did not know any better, so I blurted out "Do you have any real power or are you just a figure-head?" Tunney stared at me with a "God, another mark!" look on his face and then said, "Would I be paid all this money just to be a figure-head?" I was not about to touch that one.

So my friend escorted him to the elevators then over next door. When we were in the elevator, our real questions began. Tunney came out of character a bit, so we asked if there was any chance of getting Sting, Luger, or the Steiners. Tunney answered that the WWF is always working hard to secure more talent.

I also asked who would win between Hogan and Undertaker that night. Of course, Tunney said Hogan would, right on cue with the elevator doors opening. He then extolled the virtues of Hogan the champion. Even though Survivor Series was boring, nothing could take away the glorious fact that Jack Tunney kayfaded me in person.

Ken Knisley (Houston, Tex.): In last year's Annual, I mentioned in my "Most Memorable Moment" article that I never had a memorable moment occur at a house show. Somehow, though, I had completely forgotten about a memorable moment



DUTCH MANTEL (Photo by Wade Keller)

which had occurred at a WCW house show in Cleveland, Ohio during August, 1990.

Earlier in the summer of 1990, I decided to leave Houston, Texas to visit my family in Cleveland, Ohio for a week or so in August. I learned about the upcoming house show while watching WCW Saturday Night one night in July. I hope that this proves that cable T.V. shows do actually sell tickets to house shows. I called my brother in Cleveland and told him to purchase two ringside tickets.

The second match of the card saw "Dirty" Dutch Mantell vs. Norman. Mantell used, as Dave Meltzer later described, cheap heat to get heel heat on himself. This cheap heat consisted of making fun of the Cleveland Browns. To those who have been paying attention, I earlier mentioned that I live in Houston. To those of you who aren't football fans, the local football team is the Houston Oilers. The Oilers and the Browns are in the same division. Natural rivals. Being a big Oilers fan, as well as a fan of most wrestling heels, I naturally sided with Dirty Dutch.

Quickly sensing that Dutch was outnumbered by about 2000 to 2, I decided that he needed my help. After Dutch yelled to the crowd that he hoped that Bernie Kosar, the Browns's quarterback, would break his arm during the first game, I stood

up and cheered. The crowd around ringside began to stare at me, not quite sure what I was up to. At this point, Norman grabbed the house mic and said, "I happen to like the Cleveland Browns. I suppose that you like the Houston Oilers." In case anyone forgot, Dirty Dutch hailed from the fictitious town of Oil Trough, Tex. I guess that the residents of this town root for the Oilers and not the Cowboys.

After Norman said his piece, I immediately yelled, "I like the Oilers. I think that the Browns suck." I then stood there smiling, amazed by my quick wit. Seven seconds later, I turned around to face the crowd to see if they also appreciated my wit. What I saw shocked me: 50 or 60 very angry people staring at me. Several of them looked like they wanted to fight. My brother, who is 6-2, 210 lbs., and a bodybuilder, had a look of fear and shock on his face. He grabbed me by the shoulder and pulled me quickly down to my seat and asked me if I was crazy. It wasn't until then that I realized why everyone was so angry. I was only about a par five away from the 50 yard line of Municipal Stadium, home of the Cleveland Browns. In all of my exuberance, I completely forgot where I was. Honestly.

For those of you who are wondering what happened to me, I regained the crowd's favor during the next two matches, when I lit into the Iron Sheik, asking when he was going to finally give birth to that camel in his belly, and then when I lit into the Southern Boys, natural heels in this



IRON SHEIK (Photo by Wade Keller)

northern town. I also apologized to the crowd for my previous outburst. I explained that it was meant good-naturedly. Almost everyone eventually saw it my way.

Stuart Brynien (Brooklyn, N.Y.): I almost never buy ringside seats, either because by the time I get to the box office they've already been sold or because a ringside view often means I have to spend more time on my feet than in my seat.

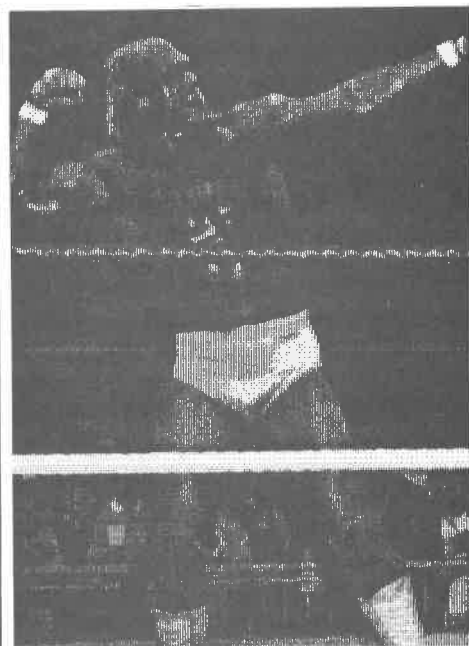
One time I did buy a ringside seat, however, that was back in the '80s, for a show at Madison Square Garden. Someone in our group had wanted to be "on top of the action," and I relented. There we were, smack in the middle of the eighth row, right on the Garden floor. Even I had trouble peering past the fans in front of me, and I'm over six feet tall. But the effort was worth it.

It was the night Bobby Backlund lost his belt to the Sheik, and it was my most memorable moment as a fan.

We might not have had the view we would have enjoyed from the ledge, for example, but who cared. History was being made right in front of us. After all, Backlund had been practically invincible. For years, he had beaten all comers. Muraco, Slaughter, The Masked Superstar. Backlund was a real-life Jack the Giant Killer, and with the help of his trusty chicken-wing he somehow slayed them all. So when the Sheik defeated him with his camel clutch—when Arnold Skoaland tossed in the towel, ending Backlund's reign as champ—it was more than a little surprising. I was dazed. We all were. We were pleased that we had seen an exciting match, but who among us had expected this to be the night Bobby lost his title? Who among us honestly believed he wouldn't find a way to win?

Now, I'm sure some of the fans in attendance knew how it would end. Maybe even a lot of them did. It would depend, I suppose, on how many wrestling newsletters were being published back then, how much inside information was available. I know that I wasn't reading any newsletters, though, and no one I knew was reading them, so if rumors were circulating that Bobby was on his way out, I certainly wasn't aware of them. More recently, of course, I've heard that Backlund didn't even know the Sheik had been promised the title, but that's another story.

I left the Garden that night wondering



HULK HOGAN

what had just happened. Needless to say, however, I soon figured it out. What had happened was that Backlund—willingly or unwillingly—had paved the way for the next great reign in professional wrestling, the reign of the Immortal Hulk Hogan—who just happens to figure prominently in my second "Most Memorable Moment." The night Hogan did escape the camel clutch, and took the title from the Sheik one month later. Of course, that was somewhat more predictable, given the enormous push Hogan enjoyed in the weeks leading up to the match, but still, you're talking about history.

Third place goes to the very first show I ever saw at Madison Square Garden, during which Backlund turned back the challenge of the Masked Superstar. Back then, he was still the invincible, all-conquering hero—and Hogan, I guess, was still just a rising young musclehead plying his trade somewhere else.

Fourth place goes, collectively, to lots of little moments, all the missed moves and badly-timed blows that reveal wrestling for what it is: a charade. The head-butt that missed by a country mile and sent the guy down to the mat; the limp-armed clothesline that barely connected and knocked the guy head-over-heals. They are as much a part of wrestling history, in their way, as championship reigns and title changes and, on a more personal level, first-ever live shows. And they can be a helluva lot more amusing.

HEELS WITH INTEGRITY

Credible Heels Are Wrestling's Greatest Underutilized Asset

By Tim Whitehead

Professional wrestling has undergone many changes in the past decade. In many ways, it only vaguely resembles the sport of merely ten years ago. Pay-per-views, referees in bow ties, reptiles, birds, Cyndi Lauper, Jason Hervey, and many other wonders (or in some cases, abominations) have reared their heads in recent years, all in an effort to broaden wrestling's appeal.

The effect of much of this broadening has been to take wrestling to all-time lows in such not insignificant categories as television ratings and house show attendance. If someone had set about to deliberately sabotage the sport, it is doubtful they could have done any more damage than has been done in recent years by the promoters themselves.

But through all the ups and downs, pro wrestling remains an integral part of the lives of those reading these words. If we were really as disgusted with the sport as we sometimes think, would we still follow it as devotedly as we do? After all, we still pay to see wrestling at the arenas, we still buy the PPV's, we still trade videotapes, and we still read the newsletters. Pro wrestling has remained a sport which can entertain us, which, incidentally, is very different from "Sports Entertainment." But that does not mean there is not plenty of room for improvement, so here is a suggestion for turning up the heat: LET HEELS WIN CLEANLY!

I have been a heel fan for years. Okay, I admit it, I have not always been a heel fan. I have been a heel fan longer than the typical Hulk Hogan fan has been aware pro wrestling even exists. I do not recall the precise moment I became a heel fan. I just realized one day that I was one. I think it was about the time I first saw Ric Flair on

Mid-Atlantic Wrestling.

Heels are what make pro wrestling the sport it is, and they deserve to be treated with more respect. Without heels, pro wrestling would be little more than a faster version of amateur wrestling, and we all know what a big draw that is, don't we? True, a couple of class acts like Jushin Liger and Brian Pillman can have a great babyface match, but it would take top tier workers wrestling all the time to sustain fan interest without heels.

The American wrestling fan did not live within the rule book even before Bill Watts added about six chapters to it with his so-called Ten Commandments. We love a good brawler, a guy who cares nothing for the fans or their opinions. A wrestler who brazenly insults the fans can sell more tickets than all but the top babyfaces, and for that matter the babyfaces could not get over without heel opponents.

When it comes to pushing heels, the average promoter has more wool over their eyes than a Bratislavian sheepdog. Heels are invariably pushed as the inferior wrestler, the one who has to cheat to win. In many cases, the heel is portrayed as an outright coward who flees in terror or begs for mercy when his opponent gains the upper hand. This leads to some obvious anomalies, which badly expose the business.

Ric Flair wrestled Lex Luger something like 2,576 times when both men were in WCW. Most of the time, Flair was the heel, but in 1989 the Nature Boy turned babyface with the help of a perfectly executed sneak attack courtesy of Terry Funk (an example of how great heels can be). During his stint as a "good guy," Flair cleanly pinned Luger night after night,

while Lex had to cheat to gain even a brief offense. On TV, Lex behaved cowardly, ducking opponents and, on one occasion, high-tailing it to the locker room to escape from Brian Pillman. But no sooner did Flair "officially" turn heel, and Luger turn babyface, then the roles were reversed. Luger could not be pinned without the blatant cheating or outside interference, while Flair could not buy a clean pin and reverted to the begging and self-disqualification tactics which have been the most unfortunate aspects of his career.

Webster's defines credibility as "the quality or power of inspiring belief." Someone who makes threats and backs them up is credible. Someone who makes threats and then flees to the dressing room is a joke, and jokes don't sell wrestling tickets. A heel who gets put over clean is far more intimidating (and thus far, more of a box office and TV draw), than a cowardly heel. Rick Rude has been the most over heel



TERRY FUNK (Photo by Wade Keller)

in the U.S. for the last several months precisely because he has been accorded more respect than the typical heel is allowed by American promoters. He has also had the advantage of having a great opponent, Rick Steamboat, who is willing to do jobs since his ego is not the size of a twenty-four inch python.

Heel status should be based on "being" as much as doing. In addition to doing certain things that we expect of heels, such as brawling or using metal folding

chairs with precision, heels should have an aura of heelness, for lack of a better term, about them. They should intimidate and their intimidation should be credible. And the more he backs up his threats, the more over the heel will become. A heel who arrogantly boasts that he is the greatest wrestler in the federation, and then proceeds to cleanly pin a top babyface, would immediately become the most credible heel around. A feud between him and a babyface world champion would possess intense heat.

In the past year I have become something of a Lucha Libre aficionado. Heels are regularly put over clean in Mexican rigs, which is one of the most intriguing aspects of this style of wrestling. Heels, or Rudos as they are called in Mexico, are well-respected in the land south of the border. Rudos brawl and triple-team their Technico foes, but only on rare occasions do they resort to using foreign objects. Cowardly begging is unheard of, and I have yet to see a Luchador flee in terror to a dressing room. It is routine for Rudos to score clean pins or even win via clean submission, even over top Technicos. Imagine Sting being cleanly pinned by Rick Rude, or the Hulkster submitting to Ric Flair's figure-four, and you have a pretty good idea how alien this is to American wrestling.

Nor are Rudos lacking in wrestling skills. Negro Casas, Fuerza Guerrera, Bestia Salvaje, and many other Rudos put



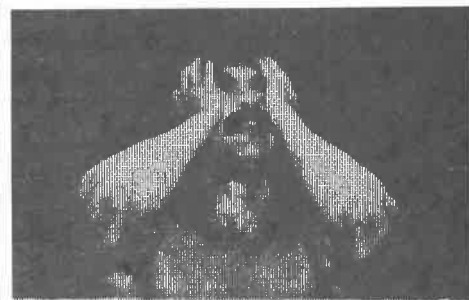
RIC FLAIR (Photo by Wade Keller)

on dazzling scientific or aerial displays or both during their matches. Never are they portrayed as inferior competitors, too incompetent to win by any method other than cheating. Rather, their Rudo status is largely based on an attitude, or aura, they possess. It is hard to put into words, but it is as if they do not care about the rules, but are so good they really do not have to go far beyond them to succeed. Rudos even have their own section of fans at the arenas, which leads me to my next point.

Heel supporters are among the most loyal hardcore fans anywhere. Sit in the ringside seats at any arena in the country and you will hear plenty of cheers for the heels, and also lots of not-so-nice comments directed against the faces, particularly the ones who play to the fans to get cheap heat. But sit in the cheap seats and you will find that heel support is considerably weaker. That is because heel fans are the first in line to buy tickets. They are also the ones who put out the extra bucks for the best seats, and they come out to the cards even when no one else shows up. These fans deserve to see their guys get put over clean every now and then!

The idea that every fan wants to see the babyface win is one of the most outdated views in wrestling. It is the same idea perpetuated in the newsstand magazines via the notorious "most popular" and "most hated" ratings. Take a look at the "most hated" list and invariably it will contain several wrestlers who are in fact very popular with hardcore fans and, for that matter, with fans in general. Case in point, once again, is Ric Flair. The Nature Boy is a permanent fixture in the "most hated" column in the *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* family of magazines. Yet, anyone who has ever seen Flair wrestle in person knows that at least a third—and sometimes half or more—of the fans are cheering for him. Among hardcore fans, Flair regularly comes in at or near the top in "Wrestler of the Year" balloting. It is stark testimony to Flair's abilities that he has maintained his respect even with all the screw-job finishes he has had to endure. Just imagine how over Flair would be if he had been booked properly over the past few years. Flair's most legendary matches are those when he got put over clean, even though technically he was the heel. What if those matches had been the rule, rather than the exception?

This is not a call for a revolution in the way American pro wrestling bouts are



"RAVISHING" RICK RUDE

booked. Lucha style wrestling could never gain mass appeal in this country (though if you watch it enough you cannot help but get addicted). In Japanese wrestling, the face vs. heel distinctions are non-existent, or at least are very subtle. The Japanese high-impact, athletically-based style could be very successful here, but only if the face vs. heel roles are made clearer. The concept that most matches should have a face battling a heel is deeply ingrained in the psyche of most fans. It cannot be simply abandoned, nor should it be. Heels, after all, make pro wrestling what it is.

Rather, what is needed is a revision in how heels are portrayed. Let some of their finishing moves actually work, not just on jobbers during TV squashes, but on the top stars as well. Let Rude put Sting away with the Rude Awakening. Let Randy Savage submit to Flair's figure-four (I know, I know, it's ridiculous to even discuss it, but it is a nice thought).

I am not saying the heel has to win clean every time. A little cheating now and then really spices things up. And I enjoy a rotten, scheming, underhanded manager as much as anyone does. For that matter, let some of the undercard heels get by on cheating. But the top heels should get put over clean most of the time. Only when this modification is made can heels truly be called credible. And only then can they truly live up to their full potential as box office draws.

Tim Whitehead is a Torch reader from Johnson City, Tenn.

BLANCHARD'S NEW LIFE

Whatever Happened to One of Wrestling's "Four Horsemen"

By Mark Nuliy

Tully Blanchard, the best professional wrestler San Antonio has ever produced, has pinned his toughest opponent—life without wrestling.

Blanchard officially retired from wrestling last summer without much fanfare. There was no grand final match or special spinoff.

A combination of an Achilles' injury and a religious awakening convinced Blanchard to change careers.

He tore his left Achilles' tendon in June while playing in a charity basketball game in Charlotte, N.C., where he now resides.

While on the stretcher heading into the operating room for surgery, the decision became clear.

"It was like a light flashing on in my mind. The Holy Spirit told me I had been disobedient," said Blanchard, who became a born-again-Christian in November 1989. "I had been wrestling when it wasn't Jesus's will. I also knew I would never wrestle for myself again."

The problem was, what would Blanchard do for a living?

"I was operated on June 26. On June 27, the pastor at Walker Road Baptist Church asked me if I was interested in speaking at their church. Another pastor called and asked me to give my testimony that same day."

Blanchard's question as to what he would do with his life after wrestling had answered itself.

Word spread, and Blanchard was immediately in demand at churches, revivals, rallies, and banquets in the North Carolina area talking about his religious beliefs.

Ironically, some remember Blanchard

as the consummate bad boy—arrogant, obnoxious and constantly in trouble.

Almost all remember Blanchard as one of the most talented athletes San Antonio has ever produced, dating back to 1971 when he excelled at quarterback for Churchill. Blanchard was the starting quarterback at West Texas State, then went to work for his father, Joe, a local promoter.

"I always led my life in San Antonio as a star, or at least what I perceived to be the lifestyle of a star," Blanchard said. "I led my life thinking I could overcome anything."

"I had a car wreck in 1974, out cruising while smoking pot and drinking beer. I was in such bad shape, I actually relaxed to die, even though I didn't know it at the time."

He was one of the leading stars of Southwest Champion Wrestling back in the late-70s and early 80s when it was regarded as having one of the best collections of talent of any booking office in the country.

Blanchard held the Southwest Heavyweight Championship on several occasions and dominated the tag team title with his partner, the late Gino Hernandez.

Blanchard joined Jim Crockett Promotions in 1984, shortly before it struck a deal to have its television show air weekly on TBS.

With a national spotlight, Blanchard held the United States and National Heavyweight Championships. He still holds the record for most times holding the World TV Title and longest reign.

He and Arn Anderson are the only team to have won both the National Wrestling Alliance and WWF World Tag Team Championships.

It was life outside the ring—"sex,

drugs, and rock'n' roll"—that gave Blanchard trouble. The more successful his wrestling career became, the more trouble he had outside the ring.

Life got unbearable in San Antonio. "In 1983, I actually contemplated suicide," Blanchard said. "I finally quit my own company and quit drugs."

Blanchard moved to North Carolina in 1984, figuring a change in residence would help.

"I got back into wrestling because I could make more money faster wrestling than anything else," Blanchard said. "Wrestling was the thing that I did the best. I had heaped up some debts."

"And it worked. I drove to North



TULLY BLANCHARD (photo by Wade Keller)

Carolina in a beat up, old Cadillac, \$400 cash in my pocket, and \$15,000 in debt. By the end of the year, my bills were paid. I bought a new car and I had money in the bank."

Blanchard thought he would have everything under control, but he didn't count on the fame that he would achieve with the national expansion.

Blanchard first dominated the television title with valet Baby Doll and later was part of perhaps the top stable in wrestling history, the Four Horsemen with Ric Flair, Arn Anderson, and originally Ole Anderson.

Blanchard because a star "of

unfathomable proportions. I never dreamed wrestling would get this big."

"I was having a great time. Sin crept back into my life. I got married and divorced again. I started doing drugs again. And I started with the women again. But I thought it was okay this time because business came first."

By 1988, Blanchard and Anderson were NWA World Tag Team Champions and generally acknowledged as the premier team in wrestling. They decided to jump to the WWF, and eventually captured that version of the world tag team title.

Then Blanchard and Arn Anderson decided to jump back to the NWA after it offered them a pay raise. Blanchard didn't realize he would end up without a place to land. Blanchard was still involved with drugs while he was with the WWF, but he had to be a lot more careful because it tested for cocaine.

Blanchard, who "knew how to beat the tests," didn't care if he flunked a test in November 1989, because he really wanted some time off before his NWA start.

"Arn and I were really getting on each other's nerves because we were spending so much time together," Blanchard said. "We got into a fight over a pizza one night in a hotel room."

But after being suspended by the WWF, the NWA took back their offer.

Then came the injury and the religious awakening. Now, he said he is happier than he has ever been. Blanchard got married Nov. 20 in Charlotte. He does not miss wrestling or the temptations of yesteryear.

"It's a life of one-night stands. You have to really like spending time in hotel rooms if you're not going out partying with the other wrestlers," he said.

Blanchard no longer watches wrestling on TV, although he is proud of his accomplishments.

"I was never that thrilled with titles," Blanchard said. "I was always more impressed being involved in matches that drew big crowds."

Blanchard refers to his toughest opponents as Terry Funk, Dick Slater, Dusty Rhodes, and Wahoo McDaniel. He said his best matches were against Rick Steamboat. His match against Magnum T.A. in the 1986 Starrcade is considered a classic.

As far as teams are concerned, Blanchard rates Anderson as his top

partner.

"Arn and I were so much more experienced and on a much higher level. We met much better competition nationally than Gino and I did regionally," he said.

Blanchard named the Road Warriors and Demolition as the toughest teams he ever faced.

While at times wrestling left a bad taste in his mouth, Blanchard thinks the torch has been passed.

He is impressed with Randolph graduate and former opponent Shawn Michaels. Michaels is currently wrestling on a team with Marty Janetty as The Rockers.

"He has a lot of 'want to,'" Blanchard says. "He want to be a great wrestler and he has tremendous potential."

Just like Blanchard many years ago.

Mark Nulty of Atlanta, Ga. wrote this article in 1991 originally for The San Antonio Light. It was reprinted with his permission.

HILDEBRAND continued from page 59

time, Mark managed "Hot Stuff" Eddie Gilbert, Iceman Parsons, Kamala, Johnny Valiant, and Larry Zbyszko, amongst many other notables.

Curtis received a trip out west in a Winnebago with Cactus Jack and eight other wrestlers. This was the true "trip to and from hell." Just ask Cactus sometime. Most notable was M.C. being asked to join the "First Family" led by Gilbert in the UWF. He would become "Little Eddie," a protégé of the then-booker. A monkey wrench was thrown into the works when the NWA and UWF merged (ironic, ain't it).

The merger left "Hot Stuff" having to answer to the big Dust and Mark Curtis's dreams drifting back to "so close, but so far away."

Having fun, but stagnating in the indies. Mr. Curtis was losing hope... then he met Bruiser Brody (see last year's *Torch Annual IV*) and a chance meeting of Dennis Corraluzzo at a close friend's wedding. It would change the tide of Mark's crusade.

The New Jersey promoter, having confidence in Mark's ability, started using him in key matches for his shows. It was because of him that people, especially in newsletters, started to take notice. It was also Mr. Corraluzzo who made Mark Curtis a Doctor.

"The only manager crazier than his



DR. MARK CURTIS AND THE PITTSBURGH ASSASSINS
(courtesy Hildebrand collection)

wrestlers—a doctor of psycho-analytical B.S.," explained Corraluzzo.

Doc's greatest moment was when then-USWA Champion Terry Funk (Curtis's idol) asked him to manage him against James E. Cornette's man, which basically ended with J.C. press slamming and backdropping Curtis in a memorable tag match in New Jersey.

Dr. Mark still manages on occasion and bears a strange resemblance to a referee by the same name in the Smoky Mountain Wrestling area where he is paying attention to and picking up tips from some of the greatest talkers in the business. It is also rumored that there is a Toxic Ninja Turtle wrestling in Ohio and West Virginia that has the same style wrestling as... as... It couldn't be?!

The author would like to thank his father, Cactus, Dennis, James, and all the others who have believed in the dream.

Brian Hildebrand is currently refereeing for SMW. He has been involved in managing, wrestling, and refereeing in wrestling for ten years. He wrote a first-person article appearing in Pro Wrestling Torch Annual IV about his experience managing against Bruiser Brody.

PRO WRESTLING REGULATION

A Case Study Examining Athletic Commission Regulation

By Paul Dizadji

There are many issues in pro wrestling that call for regulation. Ideally, that regulation is self-regulation. But without unions and with profit-motive often overtaking ethics, promoters often abuse their power. Wrestlers have to blade and bleed on each other by order of promoters. Wrestlers risk serious injury without employee-supplied insurance. Wrestlers may get underpaid by promoters and if they protest, they might never be asked to work for that promoter again.

There are other issues involving consumer protection. Promoters falsely advertising famous talent, or misleading the public claiming wrestlers are sons of stars of the past or brothers of stars of the present when they aren't. Promoters not offering refunds when a show is cancelled. Promoters not taking adequate steps to ensure the safety of the fans.

All of the above should not happen in a perfect world. But a perfect world would not need government. Thus is born the case for the regulation of pro wrestling. But legislating pro wrestling is not easy, and in fact, it is not done often. The athletic commission in Oregon is famous for being a stickler on blading. In New Jersey, deposits must be paid by promoters in order to promote a show. In Illinois, the athletic commission can be seen sitting front row at wrestling events. Even Dr. George Zahorian was an athletic commission doctor.

In 1991, attempts were made to institute athletic commission regulation of pro wrestling in Florida. It did not pass. Solid arguments were made for and against regulation of pro wrestling, but perhaps the most convincing argument against government getting involved in regulating pro wrestling is the average legislature's

lack of understanding of what is a complicated, unorthodox business—and just as important, their lack of interest in gaining an adequate understanding in order to properly institute regulation.

Other exhibition sports, such as the currently dormant roller derby and the currently active "American Gladiator" tours, have not been the subject of any regulation or prohibitions.

Pro wrestling is at once acrobatics, martial arts, ballet, and theatre. Though in the United States pro wrestling is often perceived more as farce than as athletic contest, such is not necessarily the case internationally. In Japan, for instance, pro wrestling is regarded more often as authentic athletic competition, commanding ticket prices that rival or exceed those of the hottest American boxing heavyweight title bouts.

It is by a quirk of history, perhaps, that professional wrestling currently finds itself subject to the regulatory arms of Athletic Commissions in several states. If one accepts the historical argument that such regulation was first imposed mainly on boxing in order to prevent, in theory, the fraudulent presentation of pre-determined bouts as genuine and to police organized crime, then application of that same regulation to professional wrestling is misplaced. In general, professional wrestling ceased to be bona fide at least as early as the 1930s when attrition of talent combined with marathon, skillful, and not particularly crowd-pleasing matches began to threaten the profitability of genuine presentations.

Professional wrestling should have been divorced from boxing for legislative purposes many years ago. In fact, it may be tough to justify them ever being linked.

Why the two continue to fall under the same regulatory shadow is not at all clear after logical, legal analysis. As has been written, revenue generated by pro wrestling may serve to support the boxing-related activities of State Athletic Commissions, and thus the two remain together.

Being a lawyer myself, licensed to practice in Illinois, this article will examine the laws in Illinois and examine reasons for or against regulation of pro wrestling based on Illinois laws. Illinois has one of the highest Athletic Commission tax rates on wrestling and boxing tickets, although due to wrestling events greatly outnumbering boxing events, the bulk of revenue generated for the Athletic Commission



BUCK ZUMHOFF: BLADING IS PROHIBITED BY OREGON ATHLETIC COMMISSION
(Photo by Wade Keller)

comes from wrestling.

Is this fair? What role is the commission supposed to provide? What benefits does the commission provide in actuality? How might the actual laws and rationale for such laws expose as faulty or confirm as worthy the regulation of pro wrestling by state athletic commissions?

Basis of Governmental Regulation: Police Power

A state's authority to regulate activity within its borders springs from its police

power, a broad power of government coffered upon the States by the 10th Amendment of the United States Constitution. In broad terms, legislation stemming from this police power will be upheld unless:

1) The legislation fails to meet the requirements of the Due Process and Equal Protection clauses of the Federal Constitution, which means, generally, that the legislation is not substantially related to a legitimate governmental interest or important governmental objective.

2) The aspect of police power most applicable to entertainment sports is spectator protection, including protection from pre-planned bouts in which organized crime makes bundles of cash. Unscrupulous promoters could further harm the public by advertising a wrestling or boxing show, collecting ticket money, and then cancel the show without refunds. Wrestlers and boxers could also be promised certain amounts, then never paid. The Illinois statute places consumer protection above that of employee protection.

Illinois Statute: Is It Substantially Related to its Purpose?

The problem of spectator rip-offs is apparently addressed in the relevant Illinois law, though the language of the statute in question does suggest that concern for public safety is the primary concern, above providing the State with its proper tax revenues. The applicable law is found in the Illinois Professional boxing and Wrestling Act, Chapter 111, Sections 5001 through 5026. It requires a promoter file a bond with the State Treasurer to provide sufficient proof that they can meet expenses.

Where the non-financial protection of the spectator is concerned, the law is admirably clear. Section 5009, paragraphs 3 and 4 require a promoter to file proof "of adequate security measures and adequate medical supervision as determined by Department rule, to ensure the protection of the health and safety of the general public while attending athletic events..." and "that the building to be used is properly ventilated and complies with all laws, ordinances, and regulations in the city, town, or village where the athletic event is to be held..."

These requirements do not apply to amateur boxing matches, amateur wrestling exhibitions, and amateur or

professional martial arts or kick boxing events.

Excluding amateur events, due to smaller crowds and generally less profit-motive, their exclusion is understandable. In addition, other regulations outside of the Professional Boxing and Wrestling Act apply, such as everyday fire codes. Why exclude professional martial arts and kick boxing? I don't know of any other Illinois legislation that pertains to kick boxing and martial arts.

Perhaps they are also excluded from regulation due to smaller crowds which eliminate many safety threats and do not produce enough revenue to justify the administrative costs. That may or may not be true. Then again, maybe the legislation drafters just did not care about martial arts and kick boxing.

But isn't it possible for a promoter to advertise a martial arts or kick boxing show, collect ticket dollars, and then skip town? Is public protection only an issue when large amounts of tax revenue is generated?

Section 5006 alone is sufficient to cast a shadow of doubt upon the whole of the Professional Boxing and Wrestling Act. If the entire purpose of the statute is to provide for the collection of tax revenue, then it is too broad. If the purpose of the statute is to protect the public, and secondarily, the performers, then it is not broad enough. If the only purpose of the statute is to merely provide for the continuation of a State Athletic Commission, it seems well drafted.

The Illinois Statute: Is It Enforced? Is It Enforceable?

Section 5-16, entitled "Grounds for refusal, suspension, revocation, reprimand, or other disciplinary action," however, provides for penalties and fines for "permitting any contestants or referees other than those stated on the permit application to participate in an athletic event, except... in an emergency." Numerous instances have been documented in which "emergency" substitutions took place, although promoters knew weeks in advance that certain talent would not be able to appear.

One must address a sore point here: What rational purpose does a referee serve during a professional wrestling match? The referee in a boxing match has obvious authority, for instance ensuring that rules

are followed and fights do not proceed past the point of brutality. A referee in a pro wrestling match has no such role. Normally, the referee ignores the rule-breaking of the heel or simply gets in the way of the action, taking a bump in order to make a pre-arranged finish believable. Insistence on the presence of a referee during a pro wrestling match in Illinois is a clear example of a fraud perpetuated upon the public. As regular attendees of wrestling shows are well aware, substitutions take place nearly without fail. Often, the "main event" talent is substituted. It is the rule, not the exception, to attend a professional wrestling show and be informed by the announcer that a certain performer will not be seen. As a matter of course, no refunds are offered. Clearly, this particular provision is not enforced, at least not in a manner in keeping with the plain language of the statute.

The statute contains, in addition to the above, several provisions that would seem unenforceable. To wit, section 5016, paragraph 13 provides for penalties or fines or both for any license or permit holder who allows "contestants of widely disparate weights or abilities to engage in athletic events." In boxing, weight differential is obviously enforceable. In wrestling, it is not even paid lip service. Wrestling fans may recall fairly recent matches between the wrestlers El Gigante and Ric Flair. A clear weight difference around 100 pounds was evident as was a clear ability difference. Since pro wrestling is pre-determined, weight and even skill differences in pro wrestling are not as important as weight or skill differences in professional boxing. Nonetheless, this sort of "implicit" legislation is not legally proper. A "wink among friends" is not suitable material for public law.

Paragraph 10 of the same section prohibits "engaging in dishonorable, unethical, or unprofessional conduct of a character likely to deceive, defraud, or harm the public, or which is detrimental to honestly conducted athletic events." Aside from the fact that even first-year law students should recognize this provision as unconstitutionally vague, this paragraph would seemingly require the Department of Professional Regulation to take disciplinary action against Commission referees, and in turn against the entire Commission itself for participating in wrestling matches. Is not the entire concept

of pre-determined wrestling bouts detrimental to honestly conducted athletic events? Again, if an implicit understanding exists under which pro wrestling is not be strictly examined under the Statute, then the Statute amounts to a "secret" legislation. Such legislation can be shown to violate the Due Process and Equal Protection clauses of the United States constitution, and even, perhaps, the prohibition against "special legislation" found in the Illinois Constitution (Article 4, section 13).

The fact that pro wrestling is pre-determined is enough to violate Paragraph 10. Consider the following list of activities as well, all commonplace in the wrestling world:

- 1) As mentioned, referees selectively ignoring rule-breaking.
- 2) Violence directed at female performers, who are not identified as professional wrestlers and who in any case are at a severe weight disadvantage. (This is not a reference to female-female matches.)
- 3) Wrestlers inflicting cuts upon themselves in order to suggest the brutality of the action resulted in bloodshed.
- 4) Wrestlers spitting on one another.
- 5) Wrestlers gaining "victories" through the use of foreign objects, such as brass knuckles, salt thrown in the eyes, and a host of other staged rule infractions.
- 6) Exploitations of racial stereotypes through the characters portrayed by certain wrestlers.
- 7) Exploitation of xenophobia.

The above list is meant for illustrative purposes and could be easily augmented. The list is not meant to suggest that all the above "violations" should be penalized, although clearly elimination of two or three would be an excellent development. The list exposes the utter lack of enforcement involved with many provisions of the Illinois Boxing and Wrestling Act. Consider the language of Section 5015:

"The director may appoint inspectors to assist the Department staff in the administration of the Act. Such inspectors shall receive \$50 for each day they are engaged in the transacting of business of the Department. Each inspector shall carry a card issued by the Department to authorize him to act in such capacity. The inspector or inspectors shall supervise each event to ensure that the provisions of the Act are strictly enforced."

Note the word "strictly." Clearly, the

inspectors are not performing their duties. Nonetheless, the author does not urge that enforcement begin. The problem is not pro wrestling. The problem is the statute.

Conclusions and Commentary:

If enforcement of the provisions of the Illinois Professional Boxing and Wrestling Act is not taking place, and if, as has been shown, enforcement in many instances would be ludicrous if not impossible, then clearly a change is called for, which could include revising the Statute or eliminating pro wrestling from it completely.

If the problematic provisions are revised, or at the least applied only to boxing, it will become painfully obvious that the grouping of pro wrestling with boxing was a blunder. The possibility will become evident that the Act is applied to wrestling for the sole purpose of collecting tax, and the permissibility of such application would need examination.

If pro wrestling in its entirety is excluded from the application of the Act, there would not be, as might seem the case, a justifiable outcry from boxing supporters and participants. Professional boxing is not the same as professional wrestling, and thus can legally be subject to a greater regulator burden. A constitutional question would still exist in regards to the differing treatment of professional boxing and professional martial arts and kick boxing.

Finally, to exclude wrestling from the Statute would add greater credibility to the exclusion of amateur contests from the application of the Act. Amateur contests could reasonably be excluded, for purposes of performer safety, since amateur boxing contests normally involve greater safety fears than the professional counterpart, and, due to the lack of purses and ticket revenue, the threat of organized crime involvement is nearly non-existent. While in theory the purses and ticket revenue of professional wrestling could attract organized crime, the fact that pro wrestling is predetermined eliminated the peculiar threat of fraud through thrown bouts.

If, because of its history of corruption and abuse of performers, professional boxing requires regulation, then such regulation ought to be based upon preventing the corruption and abuse of the past, not simply upon garnering tax revenue. Wrestling does not—and because of its predetermined nature, could not—share the same shady history as boxing, and therefore should not be grouped with

it.

If regulation of pro wrestling is necessary to ensure the safety of performers and uphold honest business practice, then carefully drafted legislation is required, not a sloppy catch-all statute riddled with weaknesses. The Illinois legislature has never been very much in tune with the nature of pro wrestling. As recently as 1973, for example, it was a violation to "participate in a sham or fake boxing match, sparring or wrestling match or exhibition."

As far as the issue of steroid use by wrestlers and regulation through athletic commissions, I believe the enforcement of laws against selling and using steroids should be outside the authority of the state athletic commissions.

As has been shown, analysis of legislation attempting to regulate pro wrestling must take into account the hybrid nature of the sport. Poorly drafted statutes may result from a desire to lump ring-sports together under one particular Act. Illogical and over-broad or under-inclusive provisions may result from the fact that legislation affecting pro wrestling is not subject to much scrutiny. Further, tax collecting must not be convoluted with public safety. Finally, legislation that ignores the predetermined nature of pro wrestling perpetrates a fraud upon the public, and subjects those involved in wrestling to undue burdens.

This analysis of the Illinois Statutes concerning pro wrestling regulation is a strong case against government getting involved in anything. It is so inherently lacking understanding of that which it is supposed to regulate, that it is an embarrassment.

The debate will continue to rage over whether athletic commissions should regulate pro wrestling. Bad laws or good laws, either way, regulation would never be needed if there were no dishonest promoters who falsely advertised talent or unethical promoters who acted irresponsibly toward fans and wrestlers.

Paul Dizadji is an attorney from Illinois who has been a wrestling fan for 20 years. Having experienced the backstage atmosphere of wrestling shows in states with regulation and without, he felt compelled to examine the issue in greater detail. Dizadji also publishes a humor-based wrestling newsletter called "Heavily Papered" from 9717 S. Keeler, Suite 103, Oak Lawn, IL 60543

THE KING OF THE RING

Virgil Reynolds Took A Chance of a Lifetime to Win a Title

By Jeffrey Cohen

Virgil Reynolds went crashing to the floor.

He got up, dazed, only to catch a glimpse of Alex "Air Ace" Archer flying over the top rope directly at him. Virgil had a split second to get his arms into position before Archer sent the two of them flying into the guardrail.

Behind them, 3,500 fans were screaming in delight. In the front row, a crewcutted teen with a "Party Naked" shirt howled in delight. "Whomp that mutha!" He spilled beer down the front of his pants.

Virgil took the rail full brunt, feeling his back sag. God, please let the hotel health club be open so I can take a Jacuzzi, he prayed.

Archer had jumped to his feet, white teeth gleaming. He grabbed Virgil in a headlock and whispered in his ear.

"Okay, fatboy. Roll in and we will go to the finish. Don't fuck it up."

With that cue, Archer pushed Virgil under the bottom rope back into the ring. To the fans at Georgia Great Glory Amusement Part, "Air Ace" was a hero, a living legend, the man who had come back from numerous sneak attacks, broken ribs, blinded by fire and an attempted human sacrifice to become National Champion in the World Wrestling League. To Virgil Reynolds, "Air Ace" was an ace asshole.

The crewcutted teen burbled ecstatically. "Whooo-eee!" He burped loudly.

Reynolds staggered to his feet. Archer was on the ring apron outside the ropes, signalling for his finisher. With the fans on their feet, he leaped onto the top rope for a

nanosecond, thrusting forward both forearms at Virgil's neck.

Virgil instinctively collapsed, the massive limbs barely making contact. But the force of his body hitting the canvas and a contorted expression caused the crowd to pop loudly, cheering as Archer covered Virgil for the pin. The ref counted one, two, three, and motioned for the bell to be rung.

Archer leaped to his feet and danced around the ring as the ref handed him his title belt. The ring announcer entered and exclaimed, "The winner by pinfall and still National champion... Air Ace!"

In the front row, the teen high-fived his friend, whose zipper was open.

"Jesus, that fat tub of shit almost killed me with that suplex!"

The match long over, both men had showered and were getting dressed. A few lockers down, Archer was bad-mouthing Virgil to the promoter, Vance Jurley.

"I tell you, dump that loser now! He's a sorry excuse for a wrestler!"

During the course of their eight-minute match, Virgil had been allowed to control the tempo of the fight for ten seconds. It happened four minute into the action, when he clobbered Archer with an elbow and suplexed him. For a suplex, Virgil gripped Archer's waist and turned him over, then jumped up and appeared to throw him furiously through the air to the mat.

In real life, that maneuver would cause kidney damage. But in professional wrestling, Virgil was supposed to protect Archer by lifting him through the fall. Since

Archer was seemingly invincible, he immediately jumped up and suplexed him furiously through the air to the mat.

But Virgil had forgotten to protect Archer, who had landed on his left arm accidentally. Now, Air Ace Archer was wrapping an ace bandage around his tender elbow.

In the background, other wrestlers muttered about Archer. "What a pansy."

"If I ever got the chance, I would drop him on his pointy head on the concrete."

Hurley walked over.

"You know, he's right, Virgil."

Hurley always sided with the stars. After all, they were the ones commanding 3,500 fans to a hick town theme park.

"So I screwed up one suplex, Vance," Virgil argued. "How many times have I put over this guy? Fifty times, one hundred times?"

The promoter stepped back and lit a cigar.

"How old are you, Virgil?"

Virgil scratched his head. "Thirty-six."

"Damn. Thirty-six years old..." His train of thought seemed to drift. Hurley had inherited the WWL from his father, the famed Claude Hurley, who had merged eight regional promotions into one of the largest wrestling groups in the country, with a huge chain of television outlets.

The train pulled back into Hurley's head. "You ever headlined?"

"No."

It was true. Virgil had been a wrestler for 17 years, after dropping out of college when his girlfriend got pregnant. After bouncing around in some small promotions, Hurley had hired him and put him into opening, preliminary matches, getting pinned by younger wrestlers on their way to stardom.

Virgil had won two matches in 17 years. One was a TV match against Frankie the Fiend. Frankie's arch-rival Beau Geste interfered and grabbed the Fiend out of the ring and they fought back to the dressing rooms, so the match was awarded to Virgil on a count. The other match was against Beau Geste, and Frankie interfered in another brawl. Those two bouts had occurred over 10 years ago.

The promoter broke wind. The wrestler behind him moved away discretely.

Hurley puffed. "You been with us a long time, Virgil. Solid work. Never missed a card, rarely miss a move, always make the babyface look good. I'd hate to let you go, especially before the pay-per-view."

Virgil's eyes widened. Hurley was referring to the Wrestling Titan, the WWL's first venture in pay-per-view. In just two weeks, Virgil was going to lose to Hurley's newest sensation in front of over four million viewers. Hurley would make \$8 million, Virgil \$20,000. It would be his largest one-night pay check in 17 years.

"Come on, Vance. It won't happen again."

Hurley nodded: "Damn straight. I could put anyone in against the Mortician, and I chose you."

The Mortician was a 7-3 mammoth, weighing 320 pounds. His gimmick was to come to the ring dressed like a funeral director. After pummeling his foe senseless, he would scoop him up and place him in a coffin at ringside for attendants to wheel him out. It would be a boost to Virgil's career anyway.

After another few months of seasoning against opponents like Virgil, Hurley was going to put the Mortician into the main event with Air Ace. If the live crowds went up, Archer would pin the Mortician. If the crowds went way up, the Mortician would pin Archer and lose the rematch in front of a bigger audience. Vance had a sense for these things.

"Fire him," Archer hissed.

"Shut up, Arnold," said Hurley, calling Archer by his real, despised name.

Archer pouted and slammed his locker shut.

"Fine. But if he doesn't watch his step, I'll give him something to think about tomorrow night."

Archer's idea of revenge was to humiliate his opponent in the ring, in front of an audience. Once he pulled Virgil's trunks down to his ankles. Another time, he grabbed a soda from a fan in the front row and poured it over Virgil's head.

The worst thing he had ever done was call for a leapfrog, whereby Virgil would rebound Archer against the ropes, jump over him, and then get clotheslined when Air Ace came off the opposite side. Virgil leapfrogged, but Archer had slid out to the

floor and laughed along with the crowd as Virgil stood on display, looking stupid and alone in the ring.

Virgil slid his 270 pound frame into the Jacuzzi. Man, it feels good, he sighed. Frankie the Fiend has invited him for a drink in the bar, but Virgil begged off. After the Jacuzzi, he would drive to Boarton, Georgia for the next show. It would take him until three in the morning, but he could sleep until noon and then hit the gym. He preferred to drive late at night, when the roads were empty and he could make better time.

He had seen Archer earlier. Air Ace had married a former Miss Missouri, but she was back home in New Jersey. On the road, Archer had no trouble finding companionship.

When Virgil got to the hotel, Archer was entering the elevator with a buxom blonde. "Oh man, I can't believe the way you put away the blimp," she gushed.

"Hey, all in a night's work," Archer laughed. "What was your name again, hon?"

The doors slid shut.

The Mortician entered. "Hey, Virgil."

"Hey, Stan."

The Mortician's real name was Stanley Singer. Hurley had discovered him at a truck stop, where he was checking car tire air pressures for a living. Now he was pointed to make \$5000 a week. He was wearing shorts and a t-shirt that read "Gold's Gym." The Mortician had never been to Gold's Gym. He had explained once to Virgil that a fan had mailed him the shirt and he wore it "because it makes broads think I work out. Pass the pastrami."

Earlier on the same card at the amusement park, the Mortician had piledriven Beau Geste and put him in a coffin, eliciting the crowd's awe. The next time the WWL came to Georgia Great Glory, the Mortician was going to face Air Ace Archer. The announcement had spurred furious ticket sales before the park closed. Virgil was pencilled in against Beau Geste. The announcement of that match had been met with steely silence and crickets chirping in the park grass.

"Wanna join me and Frankie for a

drink?"

"Nah. My back is killing me. I'm gonna get into the Jacuzzi."

"Okay. See ya in Barton." The Mortician lumbered towards the bar. He had cut a special deal with Hurley, who had booked him a charter flight. He arrived in Barton around the time Virgil was pulling over to use a restroom on the highway.

Virgil pulled himself out of the Jacuzzi as two young women entered. They looked like stewardesses. Virgil sucked in some of his stomach and began to dry himself off.

One of the women looked at him. "Say... You look familiar. I've seen you on TV."

Every couple of weeks, Hurley stuck Virgil onto the WWL Wrestling Supershow. He would inevitably lose, but pick up some television bucks.

Virgil tried to smile shyly.

"You're a wrestler, aren't you? I saw a couple in the bar, Denise!"

Virgil nodded. "Yeah, I'm a wrestler."

"Are you someone?"

Virgil shrugged. "What do you mean by 'someone?' I wrestled in front of 3,000 people tonight."

"No, no" she said, tugging off her skirt. She had on a bikini. "I mean, are you a champion?"

"I used to hold a tag team belt," Virgil lied.

"What's your name?"

"Valiant Virgil Reynolds."

"Wait a minute," Denise interjected.

"Didn't you lose to Crazy Carter?"

Virgil cringed. On an episode a few months earlier, Hurley had paid him an extra \$75 to let Crazy Carter pin him and then paint his face to make him look like a clown.

"Yeah," he sighed. "The promoter asked me to do that."

"You looked so silly," Denise giggled. She pulled up her top. No tan lines, Virgil observed. "No offense."

"None taken, ladies," Virgil smiled. His wife had divorced him in '86 and he couldn't remember the last time he had scored with a rat, which was what wrestlers called women they had on the road.

He stood up, hoping to impress them with his height, if not his build. "Maybe

you'll join me for a drink?"

They shook their heads. "We have an early flight," Denise said, pulling the bikini bottom from the crack of her ass. "Maybe next time you're in town."

Virgil smiled. "Well, good night."

He could hear them tittering behind his back as he left the small health club. At least now he could leave at night, he reasoned. No sex, no need to sleep in.

Idiot, he thought.

When Virgil had started wrestling, he had delusions of grandeur, just like every other young performer.

His first promoter, Terry Tablett, insisted that he learn the ropes from the bottom up. "Every young stud, I tell the same thing. You'll lose matches, then we'll give you the push to the top. If you work out, we'll keep you there and you'll get more money. If not, I'll tell you the truth and we'll figure out a way to phase you down gracefully."

In his first series of matches, Virgil lost against a former champion, Prince Power. Power had lost the championship a few months earlier and was being built back up to vie with the new champ. So, as Tablett explained, it made sense for him to beat a new guy.

In his second series of matches, Virgil lost against Tyler Tablett, the promoter's son. "You have to understand," Tablett explained, "My son isn't going to leave the promotion any time soon, so he would look ridiculous losing to a guy who couldn't beat Prince Power."

In his third series of matches, Virgil was partnered with a midget and put in mixed openers. One of the finishes to their fights had the opponent hitting Virgil with a foreign object and his midget partner then pinning him. "We have to talk," Tablett told him. "You're just not clicking with the audiences."

"Maybe if I was allowed to win a few matches, even against midgets, some of the audience would start to click," Virgil offered.

Tablett almost had a stroke. "You young punk! Don't tell me how to run my promotion! Hit the road!"

After that, Virgil went to Canada. The same thing happened with the promoter in

Toronto. That group had a wider base of support, so at least he made more money.

Two years into his career, with a wife and young daughter to support, Virgil was given the chance to work in Japan. A telegram arrived saying the Star Japan promotion appreciated his workrate and would he care to come overseas? They promised \$2,500 a week so Virgil jumped on a plane.

In Japan, he was met by a translator. "What kind of matches am I gonna have?" Virgil queried.

"You are here to — how do you say — lose" the translator told him, smiling broadly.

For the next few years, Virgil split his time between Japan and a promotion near his home in Vermont. He never won a match, but he supported his family.

Eventually, Vance Hurley took over the Vermont promotion and merged it into the WWL. He offered Virgil two options—continue to work part-time in Japan or stay with the WWL full-time. Financially, Virgil wound up making less money in the States, but there were no more 22 hour flights.

In 14 years with the WWL, Virgil fought thousands of matches. Singles, tag teams, battle royals where he was the first eliminated. He traveled five nights a week, mostly alone by car, staying at dinky hotels and working out his finances in a ratty checkbook.

The one constant throughout Virgil's career was that when his name was announced as he walked down the aisle, he would be met with complete indifference from the audience. Then, no matter whom he was fighting, he would lose via pinfall.

As Valiant Virgil Reynolds, he was recognized only for doing jobs for wrestlers with lesser skills. He was thus destined to be no higher than third match on any card, always putting over somebody the crowd wanted to see.

At 36, Virgil knew he didn't have too many good years left. In fact, with the wrestling business as a whole not doing so well, he was in danger of being dropped from the promotion. Air Asshole Archer continued to whisper in Hurley's ear. As Virgil drove to Barton, a plan was forming in his head.

Wrestling Titans was going to be broadcast live from New Jersey Meadowlands. The event was a sellout and Hurley had paid for New York Giants quarterback Jeff Hostetler to be the guest ring announcer for the main event.

Every minute of WWL television went to pushing the pay-per-view, which was selling for \$25. The main draw was the World championship battle with title holder Duke Wayne against challenger "Hot Shot" Harris. To set up their match, Harris had attacked Wayne on TV and apparently forcibly given the champion an enema.

National champion Air Ace Archer and number one challenger the Mortician were in undercard tune-ups. Virgil was pencilled in against the Mortician. Archer was supposed to face Frankie the Fiend.

But Frankie, who had been National champion before losing the belt to Archer, was refusing to take the pinfall. "Not to that arrogant son of a bitch," he told Hurley.

Virgil was listening in from his corner of the locker room. The pay-per-view was going to start in 90 minutes, and he knew this was the last thing Hurley needed.

Well, the next to last thing. An assistant ran in and whispered into Hurley's ear. The promoter spit his cigar across the room, startling the wrestlers. "What do you mean Stan's in the hospital?!"

"Just what I said—he had some bad clams or something and checked himself in," the assistant moaned. "They're keeping him over night for observation. They said he's overdosing on steroids, too."

"Jumping Jones, so are most of the wrestlers in this room," Hurley shrieked.

"So who am I fighting?" Virgil piped up.

"What?" Hurley could not add up everything happening.

"I'm supposed to fight the Mortician. If the Mortician isn't here, who do I fight? I mean, Frankie's fighting Archer."

"The hell I am," Frankie snorted. "Not if I have to do the job!"

Hurley turned beet red. "You don't have to. You're off the card. I'll have Virgil work with Archer. You don't have a problem with that, do you Virgil?"

Virgil smiled sweetly. "Of course not."

Archer popped his head in from the other room, where he was applying eye makeup. "And this time, watch those suplexes, fucker!"

The match had been choreographed earlier. Virgil had agreed to everything Vance and Archer had decided would happen. If everything went well, the whole fight would take 10-12 minutes. Virgil would get to look strong approximately two minutes total, 30 seconds up front and 90 seconds when Archer got tired and wanted to lie on the mat while Virgil dropped elbows and knees on him.

From the opener to the fourth match, which was Virgil's spot, things went smoothly. The TV announcers didn't screw up any lines, the grapplers didn't miss any moves, nobody from the crowd tried to jump into the ring. Hurley was a happy camper, strutting backstage and swatting wrestlers' butts. "What a show, what a show," he crowed.

Showtime.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the next match is for the WWL National Championship," the announcer rumbled. Excitement charged through the Meadowlands throng of 12,000.

"In the ring at this time, the challenger, weighing in at 280 pounds... Valiant Virgil Reynolds!"

"You fat bum!"

"Get a job!"

Virgil flipped the finger, which was in character for a heel. He was met with some beer containers.

Archer's theme music came up over the public address system. "And his opponent, the WWF National Champion. Air Ace Archer!!!"

The crowd was on its feet. Other than World Champion Duke Wayne, Air Ace was the most popular performer in the WWL. He ran in, slapping palms with people in the first row, tousling the hair of one youngster.

Archer jumped onto the ring apron and did a somersault over the ropes. The audience exploded as he handed his belt to the ring announcer.

The referee signalled for the bell, and as Archer was waving to the crowd, Virgil ambushed him from behind, just as

planned. He rammed Air Ace into the turnbuckle and delivered two knees to the back. Then he turned Archer around and threw him into the opposite turnbuckle.

Archer landed hard and Virgil ran in for a splash. But Air Ace moved at the last second and Virgil crushed himself. When he staggered and turned around, Archer nailed him with a dropkick to the chin.

Son of a bitch, Virgil muttered as he fell. Archer had actually tried to land the feet to the face. Virgil had tried to pull as far away as possible without making the move look ridiculous or hurting himself.

Archer grabbed Virgil by the hair, lifting him to his knees for a side-suplex. He flipped Virgil, or rather, Virgil flipped himself.

"What an awesome suplex," the announcer was gushing at ringside.

Virgil winced and held his back to sell the pain he was supposed to be feeling. Archer was standing on the middle rope, taking the opportunity to pose for the crowd.

Deciding it was time to change the tempo, Virgil shook the ropes and Archer crotched himself. Putting a goofy expression on his face, he fell back into the ring.

Virgil went to cover him for the pinfall. As he reached to hook Archer's leg, Air Ace kicked out as the referee slammed his fist onto the canvas for the first time.

Archer pummelled Virgil's midsection. Some of the shots were real, as Air Ace got in some cheapies. The consummate professional, Virgil sold each of them. Then he picked Archer up like an infant and powerbombed him, throwing him down on the mat back-first.

Surprised, Archer kicked out as Virgil went for another pin cover. He whispered to Virgil, "Lay off the pinfalls, willya?"

Virgil grunted as Archer tossed him into the ropes. Virgil ducked as Archer leapfrogged him. When he came off the ropes, Archer went for a clothesline to the throat. Virgil knew that he was supposed to leap to the finish. Instead, he ducked.

Archer, shocked, spun around angrily. Virgil came off the other side and delivered his own clothesline. Hard.

Air Ace went down as if he'd been shot, clutching his throat. The announcers,

not realizing what Virgil was doing, played it up. "I've never seen Air Ace take a blow to the throat like that! Even when 'Hot Shot' Harris drove a chair into his larynx!"

"I think he landed on his medulla oblongata! It could be shattered," his cohort answered.

Virgil took a handful of Archer's hair and lifted him to his feet. "What the hell do you think you're doing, you psycho?" Air Ace croaked.

He lifted Archer high into the air and bodyslammed him. Then Virgil landed an elbow to the face. Blood spurted from Air Ace's nose.

"Ooooh! His face is a crimson mask!" The announcer crowed. "Can he come back? Does he have anything left? Where is his intestinal fortitude?"

Archer was writhing in agony. Virgil realized he had conceived a plan, but hadn't written an ending for the match. On impulse, he clamped on a sleeper hold.

Obligingly, the referee came over. His duty was to raise Archer's hand three times. The first time, he fell limply. The multitude moaned in horror. The second time the arm was raised, it slapped Virgil's arm when released. The audience shrieked in terror, as the National Championship could change hands any second.

The third time the referee raised Archer's arm, a hush descended. The ref milked the moment. Virgil knew something the crowd didn't. Air Ace's arm was supposed to rocket straight up. He was supposed to point his middle finger and quake. Slowly, he was to summon up the remnants of his energy and power out of the sleeper, then destroy Virgil.

The ref released his grasp and Archer's arm fell limply. He was sound asleep in Virgil's mammoth grasp. The audience screamed in unison. The referee looked toward the dressing room, where Hurley was no doubt ripping hair from his head.

"I can't believe this! Why isn't the referee ringing the bell? Air Ace is out cold!" The announcer gasped.

Finally, seeing no alternative, the referee signalled for the bell. The ring announcer entered, looking puzzled. Virgil dropped Archer to the mat. Air Ace collapsed completely in a heap.

"The winner of this match as a result of

a submission... and NEW National Champion... Valiant Virgil Reynolds!!"

Virgil grabbed the title belt and held it high. Paper cups and programs rained down on him. "This is the greatest upset I've ever seen in the history of professional wrestling!" the announcer was gulping.

Pandemonium in the dressing room.

"Do you know what you've done?" Hurley was screaming. "I should fire you on the spot!"

Archer was being revived by a cold shower.

Virgil was sitting near his locker, grinning. He could see Frankie the Fiend across the room, smirking at him.

"Hey... Is it my fault Archer can't take a sleeper? He should have come to!"

"So this was an accident, huh?" the promoter hiccupped. An aide brought him a beer and he drank deeply.

"Right," Virgil protested. "You think I planned this?"

Hurley fumed. "Virgil, I have three weeks of television in the can, all the stuff we shot last Monday proclaiming Air Ace as the undisputed National Champion. Now how the hell can he be undisputed if you took the fucking title from him?"

"Dub in some new voice-overs. Shock people."

The promoter wearily sat next to Virgil. He spoke softly. "I understand why you did it. So many years without a victory. I should have seen it coming. But on the big pay-per-view..."

"When else was I gonna do it? If I did it at a TV taping, you could just erase the tape and say it never happened," Virgil explained. "This was live. Millions of people saw it at home. Twelve-thousand people saw it in person. Newspapers and wrestling newsletters will report on it. This was the surprise of the year."

"But dammit, I'm supposed to be in on these little surprises. You're supposed to just wrestle."

Virgil fixed a stare at Hurley. "Fourteen years I wrestled for you. How many pinfalls did I get? None. I won two countouts and I was on my back, playing dead when they were announced. I earned this."

He got to his feet and packed his gear.

Archer was coming to. "He stole my title!"

Several people had to hold him back.

Virgil smiled at Hurley. "Now what?" the promoter asked.

"I hold it for a while, get to defend it against a few scrubs on TV," Virgil pondered. "Let it sink in that I actually defeated Archer."

"You've ruined me," Archer screamed.

"Quit whining, you fruit," Frankie cracked.

Virgil shrugged. He knew that a few months squashing scrubs on TV and the fans would almost forget Archer's defeat. Almost. Archer never would.

Virgil smiled.

Back at the hotel, Virgil only wanted to sleep.

"There's a call for you, sir," said the clerk at the desk.

Virgil picked up the phone. It was Stan, the Mortician, from his hospital bed. "Jesus, Virgil... I just heard about it from Carter. Why'd you do it?"

"Somebody had to," Virgil replied. "How you feeling?"

"Those mussels you sent to my room last night were bad," the Mortician moaned. "At four in the morning, I called for an ambulance. They're keeping me here overnight for observation."

"How's the service?"

"They want to get me off steroids!" he moaned. "Without steroids, I'd weight 220 pounds! I'd look like a freaking girl!"

"Eat your vegetables. I'll see you at the TV tapings," Virgil said, hanging up.

Stan would get released and hightail it to the tapings. Virgil had no intention of ruining Hurley's next big star or pay-per-view attraction.

"Excuse me..."

Virgil turned, finding a vivacious young thing in a low-cut dress leering at him.

"Can I help you?" he yawned.

She beamed. "Mah name is Blanche. I was at the wrassling card... I saw what y'all did to that Air Ace. It takes a real man to do something like that."

The hair on Virgil's back went taut. "Thank you. May I buy you a drink?"

"Oh, ah don't drink."

Virgil shrugged. "Well, then I'm going to turn in. Nice meeting you."

Blanche walked him to the elevator.

"I'm all sore. I'm gonna soak in the Jacuzzi in my room."

Blanche's eyes widened.

"If your back is sore, ah give the best back rubs!"

By taking the title away from Archer, Virgil had knowingly fouled up three months of arena booking by Hurley. The original plan had Archer beating Frankie the Fiend all over the country while the Mortician beat Virgil. Now Virgil was beating Beau Geste, the Mortician was beating Crazy Carter, and Archer was beating Hot Shot Harris. Needless to say, Virgil's happiness was offset by five irate grapplers.

It was the best of times for Virgil. Despite the catcalls and wreckage streaming down from the upper decks of the arenas, he was for the first time going around the country and winning.

The victories were less than clean-cut. He would roll up Beau while holding his tight, or he would use a foreign object and job it into Beau's throat. There were several occasions when he used the old feet-on-the-ropes pinfall.

Hurley was pleased by one aspect of Virgil's surprise—TV ratings went through the roof.

"Gordon Solie's Ghost," he gushed when they came in. "The weekend after you beat Archer, we went from a three rating to a six!"

"Told you there was a method to my madness," Virgil said.

Hurley spit on the floor. "Yeah, so you read a book once. Let's see how long they stay high."

Over those three months, Virgil faced off against the top contenders on TV. Hot Shot Harris beat him by countout. Virgil got nervous that Harris might legitimately try to pin him, so he walked out of the ring. When he fought Beau Geste, he hit the referee and was disqualified, keeping the title. Later, he faced World Champion Duke Wayne in a title-for-title match that became a double countout. The ratings stayed high.

During that period, Virgil demanded

and got more money from Hurley. His salary went from \$800 a week to \$3,500 a week, stemming from his status as National Champion and the fact that people were filing arenas to see if he would be beaten.

Hurley called Virgil into his office one afternoon before the next set of TV tapings.

We have another pay-per-view coming, the November Dismemberment," he said. "I want you to face Archer in a rematch. It'll be a lumberjack match."

"No problem," Virgil said.

"Look, Virgil, I want you to lose this match. Archer's contract is up in three months and he says he'll go to the other league if you pull any stunts."

Hurley took a long puff. "I want you to sign a waiver that says if you win the match—in any manner, countout, disqualification, pinfall, submission—that you forfeit the remainder of your contract."

Virgil's revised contract ran for an additional year at \$3,500 per week. It was money towards his daughter's college education some day. Not to mention a satellite dish.

"No chance. Whatever happens, happens."

Hurley sighed heavily. "Then you leave me no choice."

The match was announced to much applause. Archer gave a prize-winning interview on that week's TV show.

"Y'know, Valiant Virgil, you're nothing but a coward. You hit me when I was down, when I wasn't looking, and when I was thinking about world hunger. Somebody has to teach you a lesson, and I demanded that the WWL Board of Trustees vote me to be that man at November Dismemberment!"

Much cheering from the crowd, but Archer hushed them.

"Some of those lumberjacks are my friends. Some of them are your friends. Some of them have no friends!"

Watching on a monitor, Frankie remarked. "Hell, he's the one with no friends."

"But the lumberjacks are my friends. Some of them are your friends. Some of

them have no friends!"

"But the lumberjacks are there to make sure that you don't try anything! And if you do... you're finished!" Air Ace concluded.

Virgil gave a very quiet, introspective interview.

"Air Ace, for years I watched pasty-faced, big-muscled idiots like you dominate the sport I loved. I never got a break, no matter how I busted my hump."

Boos filled the air.

But I always gave it my all, and that won't change at November Dismemberment! You expect me to be devious, then I'll be devious. But I will take great pleasure in beating you, one, two, three—lumberjacks or no lumberjacks!"

November Dismemberment was being run at the Philadelphia Spectrum. There was another sellout house. Since Duke Wayne was in a special tag team match, the main event was Archer versus Virgil. For the first time in his life, Virgil was going to headline a major card.

Earlier in the card, the Mortician stiffed Crazy Carter and confined him. The crowd went nuts. Stan then grabbed a mike and screamed, "Just wait and see! It won't be long until I hold a belt, and I don't care where or how I get it!"

Backstage, Frankie was applying a cold compress to his head. "Tough match last night?" Virgil asked.

"Twins at the motel," Frankie said. "She's got me in a flying head scissors."

The evening flew by and finally, the promoter sheepishly approached the title-holder.

"Well, Virgil," Hurley said. "I guess I can't say anything to you about the ending of this match."

"Enjoy the show."

Hurley lit a new cigar. "Oh, I will."

One by one, the ring announcer introduced the lumberjacks. Among them were Crazy Carter, Frankie the Fiend, Beau Geste, Hot Shot Harris, and the Mortician.

"And now, the WWL National Champion.... Valiant Virgil Reynolds!"

Virgil entered to tumultuous mayhem. Some guys in the mezzanine threw dirty underwear at him. He stepped into the ring and blew a kiss to the crowd.

The ring announcer cleared his throat. "'And his opponent... the former National Champion... Air Ace Archer!"

A roar ripped through the audience as Archer made his way into the ring. "What an inspiration," the TV announcer wept.

He leaped over the top rope and began saluting, waving a miniature American flag.

Virgil snickered. To make it look good, he figured he would pretend to let Archer get the advantage, then sucker him into the sleeper.

Suddenly, while Archer was winking at a girl on one side of the ring, the Mortician stormed in and clobbered him from behind.

Virgil stood, locked in place. It would be out of character to help Archer, whom he was about to fight. On the other hand, the Mortician could go after him next.

In a matter of seconds, attendants were carrying Archer out on a stretcher. Virgil could see Hurley at the back of the aisle, smiling grimly and shaking his head.

The Mortician grabbed the mic, waving a piece of paper. "I have a copy of the contract for this match... Read it!"

The ring announcer took the paper and recited it aloud for the crowd. "In the event that one of the participants in tonight's lumberjack match is unable to compete, he will be replaced by... the Mortician!"

The audience erupted with delight.

Virgil went over to the ring announcer. "But that would make this a non-title match," he argued.

The ring announcer went back to the contract. "If Valiant Virgil Reynolds is unable to compete, it will be a non-title match. But if Air Ace Archer is unable to compete, it will remain a match for the WWL National Championship!"

The fans went nuts.

The mortician grinned crazily at Virgil.

In the back, Hurley turned to the paramedics. "You boys better get ready. This could be a bloodbath."

At the bell, the Mortician charged. Virgil dove through the ropes to get away, but the lumberjacks pushed him in.

"Give me a break, Frankie," he

whispered.

"Sorry, Virgil," Frankie said. "If everybody was like you, no one could make a living."

The Mortician came up behind him and put him into a bearhug. Virgil could feel his ribs compressing. He managed to get his foot in the ropes and the referee broke the hold.

Quickly, Virgil turned and punched the Mortician in the face. He stocked the bigger man, but he continued to come at Virgil.

He launched another and punched Mortician in the face. He rocked the bigger man, but he continued to come at Virgil.

He launched another punch and while the Mortician was stunned, came off the ropes and hit him with both forearms to the neck.

Unable to breath, the Morticians fell. Virgil climbed to the middle rope and dropped a knee to the face. But the huge man rolled slightly, and Virgil landed heavily.

Virgil tried to get from the ring one more time, but the lumberjacks wouldn't allow it.

"Sons of bitches! I did this for all of us!" Virgil hissed.

"Who asked you?" Crazy Carter cracked.

Distracted, Virgil did not see the Mortician come up behind him and kneed him in the kidneys. Doubled over in pain, but still rational, Virgil low-blowed his opponent, ramming his knuckles into the groin.

The Mortician collapsed, rolling around the ring. Virgil went for a pin attempt, but the Mortician kicked out at two.

Virgil clamped on a sleeper hold, but Hot Shot Harris reached through the ropes and pulled the Mortician's leg through. Not seeing the pull but noticing the leg sticking out, the referee ordered Virgil to break the hold.

"Harris pulled it through!" Virgil protested.

"I didn't see it," the ref argued.

"What a brawl!" the announcer told the cable audience. "Have you ever seen a battle this intense? Whoever wins this match deserves the title!"

It was only a matter of time before the behemoth got his second wind. Virgil began to work on his legs, twisting and pulling and biting.

Applying a figure-four leglock, the Mortician booted Virgil in the chest. He felt something pull.

Wheezing, Virgil stumbled. His vision began to fog.

As the crowd screeched, the Mortician lumbered over and grabbed Virgil by the throat, lifting him into the air.

"I was trying to do this the easy way, Virg," he gasped. "But no, you had to try to beat me. Bad move."

The Mortician lifted Virgil into the air and tossed him over the top rope to the floor. Immediately, the lumberjacks rolled him back in.

Using the bottom rope, the Mortician began to choke him.

"What the hell are you doing?" Virgil managed to ask.

"Gotta make some kind of realistic comeback."

Virgil was bodyslammed and piledriven. Taking mercy, the Mortician even protected him somewhat. But Virgil knew what was coming.

"Be smart," the Mortician warned.

He whipped Virgil across the ropes. As he came back towards his foe, the Mortician extended both of his arms, to double-KO Virgil.

With the last vestiges of his strength, Virgil put on the brakes just in time. It must have looked perfect, because the audience was on their feet, counting along with the ref as the Mortician put his foot on Virgil's chest. One, two, three, a new champion.

The ring announcer came in as the referee gave the Mortician the belt.

"The winner, as a result of a pinfall... and NEW WWL National Champion... the Mortician!"

Virgil staggered to his feet. He could see someone running down the aisle.

It was Archer. He wore an oversized, cartoonish bandage on his head and shoulder. None of the lumberjacks looked surprised, as they all went to restrain him.

Archer motioned for the mic and the ring announcer obliged. "I challenge you to a match at the Violent Valentines pay-

per-view!" Archer bellowed.

The Mortician got the mic and pondered the request.

Virgil saw Hurley in the back, smiling, having had this angle in motion for who knows how long.

"I will... BURY YOU!!" the Mortician yelled.

The crowd exploded.

Before the ring announcer could get the mic back, Virgil grabbed it.

"Mortician!"

Virgil saw the cigar drop out of Hurley's mouth.

The Mortician stopped, questioningly. Archer's eyes widened in terror. The lumberjacks froze.

"It took an incredible battle to beat me...I applaud you..." Virgil began. "But now, if you're going to fight Archer, you need help! He has years of experience and you are a relative novice!"

Hurley was frantically looking for someone to cut the juice to the mic.

"So as of now, I am officially retiring to devote myself to being your MANAGER!"

Virgil dropped the mic just as it went dead. As it landed, no sound went over the public address system.

He went over and raised the Mortician's arm.

Hurley was having a fit.

"Nice move, Virg," the Mortician said.

"Thanks, Stan. It was about time I got out of the ring," he answered.

Wrapping up the show, the announcer told the audience, "Who would believe it? Soundly beaten for the WWL National Championship, Valiant Virgil Reynolds has become the Mortician's manager!"

The crowd booed as everyone began filing from ringside. Virgil and the Mortician stayed in the ring, milking the moment.

"Folks, it could only happen in professional wrestling."

Jeff Cohen is a freelance writer from Great Neck, New York. Cohen also publishes "Fantasy Federation" newsletter bi-monthly from 50 Shelley Lane, Great Neck, NY 11023 at \$3 per three issues. It features fictional commentary on dream matches in wrestling.

EMLL: SURVIVOR IN MEXICO

Why EMLL Is The Best Run Wrestling Promotion Today

By Steve Sims, Lucha Libre Weekly

Mexico's largest promotion, EMLL is the most well run promotion in the Western Hemisphere.

"EM... what?" some of you may be asking. EMLL stands for "la Empresa Mexicana de la Lucha Libre." This promotion, based out of Mexico, has weathered two crises more severe than any American or Mexican promotion has faced in recent years, but has persevered and is now the best run wrestling promotion in the Western Hemisphere.

EMLL has faced the following this year:

- In May, a new wrestling promotion was formed and stripped EMLL of some of its most valuable front-office, promotional, marketing, wrestling, training, and refereeing talent.

- A gyrating flirtation with television threatened to not just hurt the promotion at the box-office, but change the very nature of its promotional thrust.

- Its attempt to bring in new talent it wanted was constantly thwarted by both licit and highly questionable business practices, not only from its competition, but also from its overseas friends.

- It suffered greatly from a long-standing association with a wrestling union that many speculate may be corrupt.

- It even risks suffering from its sown successes.

Now, let's examine these points one at a time, comparing them with other North American promotions of recent years and how they have handled similar challenges:

1. How often in the last few years has a new "national" wrestling organization started in the U.S.? I suppose that depends on how you want to define it. The GWF certainly counts. Going back to 1986-'87,

Bill Watts's UWF counts. How about the USWA since they have been on ESPN? Or the constant reworkings of WCW? Well, to be sure, none of them had the success that Mexico's newest promotion, AAA (Astencia, Asesoria, y Administration), did after forming in May.

AAA came to life when the vice-president of EMLL, Antonio Pena, and EMLL vice-president in charge of public relations left EMLL. They took along several of EMLL's top wrestlers and some of its own champions. The best known of the wrestlers who jumped were Konnan el Barbaro, el Hijo del Santo, Octagon, and Pedro "el Perro" Aguayo.

Despite national television, either on cable or through syndication, none of the American upstarts ever hit the big time, yet AAA was a success literally from day one. Why? Among other reasons, they put as their number one priority putting the best talent they could find into the ring at all times. That is, regardless of how ridiculous their wrestlers' costumes or the promotion's storylines were, they always put out 100 percent with the best workers they could draft. And one of the biggest reasons for the failure of the upstart American promotions was the lack of immediately-well-known talent.

How did EMLL handle this raid, losing much of its top talent? In fact, they lost 50 of their top 200 stars, among those 50 were 25 who rank in the top ten percent of the wrestlers in the entire country in terms of talent. The AAA also took some top-flight office personnel.

EMLL responded in four ways. First, they signed as many of their first-line wrestlers, both in terms of workrate and drawing ability, to long-term contracts. Second, they started having clean finishes in virtually every match, and absolutely in

every big title or singles match. Third, they immediately started promoting week-to-week return angles at all spot shows at arenas they run weekly, regardless of how small the arena. And fourth, they put on as many big matches as they could.

In this way, the fans knew that while some talent might leave EMLL, those who remained would be familiar big stars involved in big matches with clean finishes no matter at what arena the matches were taking place.

In other words, EMLL looked diversity in the face and responded with the best



KONNAN (Photo by Mike Lano)

possible product they could put together. They did not necessarily give the fans 100 percent of what they wanted. They did not let the babyfaces win all the time; in EMLL, the babyfaces win about 50 percent of the time. They responded and gave the fans excitement, action, and results, all from top-notch workers.

2. How does a promotion make hay when first worshipping at the altar of television and then being forced to go to a small church?

Until Sept. 1991, EMLL did not televise its big cards in Mexico City. It was feared by both the promotion and the wrestlers' union that televising their events would create two evils: First, those with "television charisma" rather than "arena

style" would become the focus of the promotion, kind of like the difference between a Ronald Reagan (the "TV" President) and oh, say a Sam Nunn (a "workhorse" senator, not a "showhorse"). Second, if fans could see a big card on television for free, why would they go to the 14 to 21 arena shows EMLL promotes weekly?

It is arguable that the biggest cause of the 1990s death of American pro wrestling as we know it is too much television, just as it was in the 1950s. Too much exposure for the talent at the top plus too much exposure for the small circuits which resulted in no one being new and fresh when they came to the big circuits all added up to staleness and decreased revenues all around.

Many in EMLL believed that, though these same risks are there, the money to be made from television was simply too much to ignore. In fact, now all three of the existing promotions have weekly television in Mexico City and around the country.

EMLL, in particular, was hurt right away by the advent of its television. Attendance dropped on its Sunday shows (which were not the week's biggest show on a typical week) as soon as the Sunday show began regularly airing. In fact, the attendance at its shows the other nights of the week also dropped at first.

But in January, EMLL returned for its quarterly six-to-seven-week tour of la Arena Mexico, its home arena. This arena features other acts such as Holiday on Ice and the Moscow Circus each year, so wrestling has only a part-year run there. What did they do? They put on fan-pleasing big shows, big angles, and had their best workers in the big matches right away. Just as was the case with the Von Erichs in Dallas, EMLL gave the fans issues so interesting that even though the show would be televised less than 48 hours later, the fans still wanted to see it live for themselves. Again, the promotion made its product interesting, rather than pandering to the fans' desire for instant gratification.

And isn't that the secret of television? With the exception of the WWF, hasn't every circuit at its hottest simply rebroadcast its biggest, most successful cards and then essentially told its fans to come out to the arena next time to see it live?

In the U.S., we have the television taping and squash matches, concepts that are foreign to most of the rest of the world. There may be one squash match in a year on EMLL, AAA, All Japan, New Japan, or All Japan Women shows. Often, many

months go by without angles, new feuds, and no singles matches in Mexico and Japan. Television is used to building the style and getting the wrestlers to establish their characters and wrestling styles. That is the total opposite of virtually every promotion in the States. Think about how many squash matches and how many angles you will see on WCW and the WWF this week. In EMLL, odds are they will have four six-man tag-team matches with all of the wrestlers going all-out, ending with clean finishes with the heels winning two of the four matches.

EMLL attendance between January and August rose back up near its pre-television levels. Maybe they learned the same lesson that the Japanese promotion learned in the late-'80s—how to expose your talent without overexposing it.



EL HIJO DEL SANTO (Photo by Mike Lano)

As far as changing churches, just as EMLL was getting a feel for how to promote with a Sunday afternoon television slot, AAA came along, grabbed the slot, and relegated EMLL to Saturday nights, a clearly inferior slot. To its credit, EMLL has kept right on sailing, using the same formula: big matches cleanly fought among two bipolar styles ending with clean finishes with a modicum of showmanship thrown in.

Also, EMLL had to guard against the "television friendliness" of its wrestlers becoming the dominant gene in their gate reproduction. With one enormous exception, the promotion has kept the push of its key wrestlers commensurate with

their television exposure rather than with their television appeal. The one exception is "The Canadian Vampire."

3. EMLL tried constantly to bring in new talent in the past year. Sometimes they got through and sometimes not. How can a promotion prosper without new talent? And how can they plan if they are never sure if the talent they want can make it?

Another of the main causes of the decline of the popularity of wrestling in America in the last few years has been a lack of new, fresh talent. I attribute this to two reasons. First, national and cable television exposes almost every wrestler working in the country to nearly every fan at some point during the year. Second, and more important to me, there is no basic foundation of wrestling training facilities in the States.

This is certainly not true with EMLL. One major way they have kept on top is to control the flow of new talent into its organization through its own training center. The offices of EMLL occupy the fourth floor at la Arena Mexico. One floor above is the main training ring and gymnasium for EMLL wrestlers. Until May, this facility was headed by Jose "Pepé" Casas, the father of three of the top twenty wrestlers in Mexico: Jose "el Negro" Casas, el Felino, and Heavy Metal. (Father Pepé and son Heavy Metal jumped to the AAA in May.) Even without Casas, though, EMLL still manages to train its wrestlers in a wide variety of styles at its own gym.

It should not be presumed that only the main stars that are seen on television work out there. Many of the younger stars, those who work at the small arenas on the outskirts of Mexico City for their salary, train there in the hopes of eventually donning a new outfit and working for the major leagues.

The combination of its own training gym, a variety of trainers, and a number of smaller independently-promoted house shows for its youngest wrestlers to work allows EMLL to avoid staleness.

Many believe that the best way to avoid staleness is to take an older wrestler and put him under a new costume. That is done from time to time in Mexico, but rarely in EMLL, which seems to believe much more in continuity. The notable exception in 1992 has been the placing of the awesome athlete Eddy Guerrero under a mask as "la Mascara Magica," although this was done in large part to get over a midjet wrestler based on that same

gimmick.

Finally, as noted above, EMLL's bringing in of new talent is often complicated by both legal and underhanded tactics from the competition. Several cases come to mind. Late last year, EMLL wanted to bring in Yoshihiro Asai from the Mexican UWA promotion to be "Saigon Dragon, el Ultimo Dragon." UWA promoters literally held onto Asai's work permit, forcing a very-last-minute change in promotional plans for Dragon's debut. Also, EMLL tried to bring in some of Japan's top talent for the contractually-aligned SWS promotion. EMLL had Naoki (Naoki Sano), The Cobra (Jyoji Takano), and Ishinirki all set to come in in June of 1992. Suddenly, the SWS promotion split in two and each of these three Japanese stars went to an offshoot promotion (NOW). The contracts remained with the SWS (now called WAR), though and EMLL had to use King Haku instead of the three Japanese it really wanted.

Still, as the Japanese have learned, the best foreigners can come in and add a whole lot to a promotion. Even those with a funky charisma while not so good in the ring, such as Solomon Grondy or Vampiro Canadiense, can draw. The big money lies in native versus native, and EMLL stayed with this well-learned lesson throughout the first months of 1992.

4. Wrestlers in Mexico members of a wrestler's union. EMLL, Mexico's oldest promotion, has been around since 1933. It is closely affiliated with the National Syndicate, the wrestlers' union. During the last year, this union has come under fire for being corrupt in many ways. What problems did this create for EMLL? How did they overcome them? How does this relate to American wrestlers and promoters?

The union is not, in fact, related to EMLL. These are two separate entities. But every EMLL in-ring performer belongs to the union. What EMLL saw is that the negative publicity resulting from the accusations leveled against the corrupt union could hurt the business in two ways: (1) by making EMLL wrestlers look like they belong to a union of gangsters and (2) by the theory that any negative inside information released to the public will sour the public on seeing the fantasy tales told in the ring.

The second view is widely believed to have come true in the States in the last year. Scandals from the Gulf War to steroids to

sex to you name it may have had the general effect of seriously hurting business at the box office.

What EMLL did was counter-attack in two ways. First, it separated all its biggest stars from appearing in public with or commenting about the leaders of the union and their problems. Second, it focused strong new attention on matters in the ring. It created hot new issues among its biggest stars and kept fans seeing top-notch work from its top-of-the-line stars. In the end, EMLL negated scandal by making a renewed emphasis on what took place inside the squared circle, avoiding trouble when it could, and pushing its most charismatic (and cleanest) stars right to the top.

5. EMLL does suffer risks from the richness of its own successes. That is, it may find that the chocolate cake tastes really good, but too much of it is not a sound diet. The temptation when one is in a war, and something new that is tried worked, is to throw away the tried and true and strike out on new ground. The two clear examples about which I speak are television in general and "Casavoa, el Vampiro Canadiense" in particular.

A parallel example from the states was when one rock 'n' roll tag team made it huge in the early '80s. As a result, even today American promoters are still trying to promote the new goody-goody rock 'n' roll teams. The Junkyard Dog was a big hit as a lead babyface—and as a black one. So what will save us? A new lead babyface. And, in the WWF, the script of having your best friend turn on you may have worked for Hogan and Orndorff, but how many times has it failed since?

In its own territory, EMLL had its own similar attempts to make lighting strike twice during its 59 years in business. Suddenly, if something works, do you try to duplicate it with a "new copy" again and again? EMLL said no.

EMLL now has the single most "over" professional wrestlers in the world—Casanova, el Vampiro Canadiense (Ian Hotchkisson). Recently, four West Coast EMLL fans tried to see the Vampire after a show in Mexico City and reported that due to the crush of fans waiting to see him, it took the Vampire nearly one hour to go the few feet from the locker room door to his car.

The risk is to take another blue-eyed and blonde-haired foreigner and try to duplicate a one-time lucky shot. I believe

that to the great credit of EMLL, they have looked elsewhere, to an Art Barr or a Mike Shaw, for example, so that they have several different types of foreigners helping them out, and not a bunch of weak copies.

I further think this is one of the key reasons the American promotions have declined so badly as of late. Instead of learning from the past, they have tried to



LOVER BOY (Photo by Mike Lano)

recreate it. That is, they look at the success of the Junkyard Dog and say, "Boy, that black babyface worked. Let's try it again." But what worked was the new concept and the charisma of the Dog himself. That's what always works—the individual and the execution of the new idea.

The successes of the future are built in two ways: the continual returning to the old foundation of a solid home base (keeping the successful items that have worked long-term and sticking to them) and the constant trying to implement new ideas and new characters rather than copying someone else's original ideas.

But the chances of other promotions learning from EMLL's successes are not good. But if each country would look to others for ideas and examples of failed experiments, all would benefit... especially the fans.

Steve Sims of Chicago, Ill. is editor of Lucha Libre Weekly and is considered one of the top experts on lucha libre-style wrestling. Sims has travelled to see wrestling internationally in Mexico and Japan.

ANN CALVELLO

INTERVIEW

Roller Derby: Fascinating Parallels With Pro Wrestling

By Curtis Minato

*Round and Round She Goes
She's the Queen of the Roller Derby,
Leon Russell*

In September of 1972, professional roller skating drew 55,000 fans to the old Comisky Park in Chicago. Less than five years later, there were no games skated anywhere in the country. Today, an occasional Roller Derby is played in the Bay Area or on the East Coast and the star of stars now, as was then, is Ann Calvello.

With her hair polka-dotted, arms tattooed, and giant hoop earrings flying, America had never seen anything like her. Calvello came on like the head motorcycle mama of the Hell's Angels, Senior Division, and against her arch rival, Joanie Weston, the female Hulk Hogan. Seldom have been the forces of good and evil been so clearly delineated.

Today, Calvello's style preceeded and perhaps influenced the managerial antics of Sensational Sherri and Madusa. Such great Japanese stars as Dump Matsumoto and Bull Nakano are so similar to her that they should be considered direct descendents. Although others have been dubbed "The Greatest Heel" or "The Original Bad Girl," all who have seen her know the truth: There has never been anyone more vicious, more nasty, or more fun to watch than Ann Theresa Calvello.

From her home in San Bruno, California, the 62 year old Calvello spoke of the rise and fall of Roller Derby, a promise fulfilled and then broken.

Curtis Minato: *There are people reading this who've never seen Roller Derby. Can you explain what it is?*

Ann Calvello: I'm not sure I know

myself. I've been going around in circles for so long (laughs). Well, Roller Derby is a sport which. I'm surprised people still recognize because we haven't been on live television in the Bay Area since 1973. It is played in alternating men's and women's periods. There are five skaters on each team and you score points by passing members of the opposite team.

Minato: *How did you start?*

Calvello: Oh, jeez, again! (laughs). When you quit asking me, I'll start worrying. I'm from a Navy father, the eldest of six. It seemed that my mother was always pregnant, and there really wasn't anything to do, so I went to the roller skating rinks. I guess I was a tomboy. I was always a good athlete, and of course going to Catholic school for twelve years and having a father in the Navy, you didn't need to teach me about discipline. We moved from Norfolk, Virginia to San Francisco in 1941, and I discovered the local skating rink. At the time, there was dance skating, sort of like what they do in the Ice Capades, only on roller skates. It was beautiful, but I wasn't any good at it, so I took up speed skating. I got on the racing club with the boys because the girls would always poop out. In 1948, some people came up from L.A., including Buddy Atkinson Sr. They were organizing something called International Roller Speedway and were going to Europe. Burt Friedlow, who was Eleanor Parker's husband was sponsoring the IRS and took us all over—Paris, Guam, Belgium, Manila.

After we came home, the Roller Derby came up here. They were trying to recruit skaters and they always needed girls. Always. The guys on the team all wanted to

try out. I didn't even know what Roller Derby was, but the guys were so gung-ho about joining that instead of going skating that night, we all went to the Roller Derby. They said bring your skates. They had tryouts and none of the guys made it. In fact, one guy I grew up with didn't make the Derby and became a fireman. It was the best thing that ever happened to him. He's retired with a pension. I'm working at Safeway. (laughs)

Rosie Baker, or Elbows Anderson, asked me if I would like to get on the track. I really didn't know. Eventually, I did get up there and it was like a duck taking to water. They asked me to go on tour with them on the spot. I was only 19 and I had to get my father's permission. I was really surprised when he said I could go. The next thing I knew, I was in Salt Lake City on the Chicago Westerners.

Minato: *Who were the other skaters on the team?*

Calvello: Annis Jensen was my captain, Joyce Beasley, Mary Fabian, Betty Boyd, Annis's husband Rosie Baker was coach, but the rosters changed all the time. Rosie has sort of mellowed out in his old age, but he was a very tough person to skate for. I really didn't like the way he treated people. It was almost as if he thought that they didn't have feelings. He was very much feared, though I wasn't afraid of him. I was streetwise when the cord was cut.

Minato: *How long did you train?*

Calvello: I learned very quickly, but it was really up to the individual. In those days, the tracks were set up in each city for four to six weeks. If you weren't a good skater, you trained all day long, skated the game, then trained after the game. Leo and Oscar Seltzer, I used to call them Bromo and Alka Seltzer, once came to a game in Phoenix, Arizona. We all thought it was a pretty good game, but they didn't like what they saw. So they made us train until one or two in the morning after skating in that hot sun. We used to skate double-headers, Thanksgiving, New Years. It was unbelievable.

Minato: *Did the Seltzers always control the Derby?*

Calvello: Oh yes. They had a monopoly on Derby sort of like Abe Sapperstein had on the Globetrotters. There

was complete control over us. One person owning all of that had tremendous power. At the beginning it was okay, but after a while you begin to have certain responsibilities and bills. If you wanted to skate, you couldn't go anywhere else. We were all pretty much skating because we loved it.

Calvello: Do you think a problem with the game was that there were really only two who owned the leagues, Bill Griffiths with Roller Games and the Seltzers with Roller Derby?

Calvello: That's the problem with any sort of group. Bill Griffiths did the Roller Derby a favor when he started Roller Games in 1960. In the '30s, many different groups tried it and never made it. Bill Griffiths and Jerry Hill at least made it. It was a different game to be sure, but at least it gave everyone a place to go when the Derby was screwing us. Remember, if you've got two or three hundred people working for you for nothing, you're not going to do anything about it.

Minato: What sort of salaries were made?

Calvello: When I first got in, I got 80 dollars a month, plus room and board, so in those days, it was all right. This was in the '40s. I skated ten years before I ever made 100 dollars a week. Some like Toughie Brasuhn, God rest her soul, and Ken Monte were married and were also top skaters so they made a good living.

Minato: How long did it take before you became a top skater?

Calvello: I'm a double Leo, a born leader. God just gave me that ability. You've seen me skate, I'm not shy. People paid attention to me right away. Even when I was the new kid, I was a top skater, and I was a captain after six months. Bobby Johnstone hurt her back and held tryouts for the position. She went by seniority, and although there were two girls who had been in longer than me, they didn't have the leadership qualities, so she chose me. That's how most skaters got their shot. You stand on the sidelines waiting for someone to get hurt so you could get your turn, sort of like Steve Young waiting for (Joe) Montana to get hurt.

Minato: Were you noticed because of the "Ann Calvello look"?

Calvello: It was different, of course, but then I always did things differently,

even before I was in the Derby. I'm not a follower. I just tried to coordinate everything with the team colors. In the '40s and '50s, I had to use car paint on my nails because there weren't the colors. I'd be using eye make-up on my lips for the same reason. I always wore different colored gloves, different colored elbow pads, different colored skates, different colored earrings. I finally started dying my hair



ANN CALVELLO, 1966 (Photo by Steve Schwartz)

different colors because there was nothing left to coordinate.

Minato: What was it like being on the road, especially for a woman?

Calvello: In the old days, we all lived together. We lived in the company building, had a cook, and had things taken care of for us. We were like a family.

Minato: Women were always the stars of the game. Why do you think that was?

Calvello: Now you see a lot of women athletes, but when Derby was born on August 13, 1935, which also makes it a Leo, there were very few. It was also the only sport where men and women competed on an equal basis. In those days, when our partner got hurt, men or women, the other

would have to skate in the field, and the women were always rougher than the guys. When you get two women who don't get along, fine. Get ten and watch out.

Also, our tickets (laughs).

Minato: Can you explain what "tickets" are and how that phrase came about?

Calvello: Tickets are the boobs. Tommy Atkinson was a wild and crazy guy. He used to go around to all the new girls and he'd ask to see their tickets. They all thought that it meant admission tickets or something. Then he'd ask if he could punch their tickets. A few girls fell for it.

Minato: Did the guys ever resent the popularity of the women?

Calvello: In the old days, no. The guys did have a habit of needling us and intimidating us. They were always trying to make us cry. Once in L.A., after I had my daughter, Billy Bogash said, "Hey Calvello, you getting old?" That didn't make me cry, it ticked me off. So I said "I'll show you. I'm going out on every jam tonight and I will either get blocked out or score." Annis was on the team, so I told her to come out with me and take out any opposing jammer who was out with us. And I did it. I went out on every single jam and that was when the periods were 15 minutes and the jams were 2 minutes. After it was over, I went over to Bogash and said, "Now say something." He shut up after that.

Minato: In the early days, how popular was the Derby?

Calvello: I really don't know, but from what I've been told, it was very popular. In 1949, we were televised live coast to coast, believe it or not. Famous movie stars used to come to the game. They would start the games and then sit in the audience. Ken Monte used to do commercials for "Lucky Strike" cigarettes and Toughie used to have giant billboards in upcoming cities announcing, "Toughie is coming."

Minato: What was Toughie like?

Calvello: Toughie was a great skater, don't get me wrong. But she was a very, very vicious woman. Not just violent, but vicious. She was a dangerous skater and she'd get carried away.

Minato: Wasn't she known to legitimately hurt girls, especially the new ones?

Calvello: Yes, and it happened more

than once. I can still remember her choking girls in the infield and getting pleasure out of it.

Minato: Loretta Behrens?

Cavello: Loretta was going with (Charlie) O'Connell at the time and he sort of brainwashed her the way Elbows did with Joanie (Weston). They'd say, "You're too big to fall," "You're too good to get scored on," and they'd start believing their own publicity. Charlie said to Loretta, "You're going to be the new Toughie." She believed it, so at times, if a new kid who was good happened to pass her, she'd get mad and try to hurt her. I mean really hurt her. Anybody can get out there and put a kid through a rail and end their career. I can do that. It's very easy. But I don't want that, because that's not what the game is about. I want competition. I want to learn from the new kids. The first time I skated Toughie, I passed her 13 times and she tried to pull that with me. I didn't back down from her one bit. In later years, I had it out with both Toughie and Loretta about this, and I don't care. What they did was wrong.

Minato: Gerry Murray was thought to be the greatest skater of all time. Do you agree?

Calvello: You know I don't like to compare skaters because I think everyone is an individual, but Gerry was definitely a great, great skater. I'm a competitor and I always liked skating against the greats because it was always more dangerous to skate against an inexperienced skater. When you were against her, Gerry forced you to skate. She made you better. Later, I skated with her and we got along great.

Minato: When did you first leave the Derby?

Calvello: In '52, when I got married. And I never had any intention of going back. My husband was a referee, Roy Langley. It was hard times for us as neither of us had a job. In 1954, I had my daughter, Theresa Ann. I'm Ann Theresa. That year, the San Francisco Bay Bombers had just started up and were going to L.A. almost every week to skate the L.A. Braves. I was divorced in 1956, and I was asked to join the Bombers. I sent my daughter to live with my mother and thus became the "Original Bomber."

Minato: Did your daughter ever want to skate?

Calvello: Never. She's a Leo too, but an entirely different kind of Leo. She's a very strong person, but she would never want to be an Ann Calvello clone.

Minato: When did you join Griffiths and the Roller Games?

Calvello: Leo Seltzer's son, Jerry, had taken over the Derby and I could just never communicate with him. I had animosity for not being paid what I was worth. Others were moody, temperamental, not showing up, never doing interviews. I always did as I was told. I guess he thought I didn't have any place to go. I'd just had it with him, so I quit in 65 and went to Hawaii. Then both Seltzer and Griffiths called me and I went with Griffiths for a few years. I didn't go to Roller Games. They came to me. I was the captain of the San Francisco Shamrocks and naturally I had green hair. You should have seen Annis and me get off the plane—her with her red hair, me with green. It was breathtaking.

Minato: What are your memories of that period?

Calvello: The Shamrocks had me, Annis, and Judy Arnold on the team, all San Francisco girls. We had the most beautiful uniforms, green and gold with a giant shamrock on them. I remember having the hardest time finding shamrock earrings, so I finally just made some out of shamrock pins (laughs). We skated the T-Birds with Terri Lynch, Liz Hernandez, and Honey Sanchez, so the games were all really good. Right after the Forum was built, we skated there and sold the place out. Even the Lakers couldn't do that at the time.

Minato: Did you have trouble adapting to the more theatrical style of the Games?

Calvello: Not really. You must have color and showmanship. They did it a different way.

Minato: Did you like one style better than the other.

Calvello: I liked the Derby game when I got used to it. But what was so bad was that a lot of coaches and captains never put the helmets on the right people. There was a lot of jealousy there. Many didn't want the skaters to get recognition so they buried them in the pack. If you're reading this, you know who you are. That happened less in the Games, because they didn't use

helmets. And as I said, it gave people a chance for a life.

Minato: When you returned to the Derby, you were the head villainess. Then you began your legendary feud with Joanie Weston, which I believe is the greatest feud in all sports entertainment. Was it so good because you two really don't get along, as has been long rumored?

Calvello: Well, the feud could have been a lot better. Joanie's always resented me and it's as plain as the banana nose on my face. I don't know why because she loved to be cheered and I loved to be booed. The first time she was ever booed, she sat in the dressing room and cried.

Joanie wouldn't have even been on the Bombers if I hadn't left Derby. When I returned in 1967, she'd become a superstar and had a lot of pull with Seltzer. He was a fan and he thought that Roller Derby wouldn't survive without Weston or without O'Connell, which is ridiculous. Any sport can get along without any star. So Joanie always made sure I had a much weaker team than she had. Instead of battling her, I had to make sure that my girls could keep up with hers.

The skaters love me because I treat everyone the same. Everyone is a human being. I tell them to keep their personal lives out of the locker room and from 7 to 10 you are a professional. Jim Greene told me that when he was starting out, I was the only one who talked to him and made him feel at home. I've done that to every skater who's walked in that dressing room. Joanie doesn't feel that way. Most of these kids who are now skating are skating because of her. She was their idol. But when she comes in the locker room, she sits down, doesn't say a word and becomes a brick wall. After that, everyone's morale goes way down. She thinks everything has to be done the way she wants, so it makes things difficult. Joanie Weston is not what she appears to be.

Minato: After skating an entire game, you and Weston would always have a climactic fight, which would sometimes go on for three or four minutes. Wasn't it difficult having to skate the game, set up a narrative, and then have to finish it off with something so strenuous?

Calvello: I've always had endurance, so it never bothered me. When I would skate on the All-Star teams, I was never able to skate the whole period because

there were so many top skaters that they had to give everyone a chance. I'd be in the infield jumping around because I'm so hyper. And I was always in good shape. God has given me a good, strong body.

Minato: This was during the late '60s and early '70s. How popular was Derby then?

Calvello: On Sundays we were televised live to the Bay Area from Kezar Pavilion. Our syndicated shows went out all over the country. We had a huge viewing audience. There was so much radio, television, and newspaper coverage that I can't remember it all.

In 1969, Frank DeFord came out to do a story for *Sports Illustrated*. He had anticipated it as being a hatchet piece on the Derby. But after spending weeks on the road with us, seeing games and interviewing us, he changed his mind. He developed real respect for us. He wrote a great fourteen page article. Fourteen pages in *Sports Illustrated*. He then wrote the only book on the Derby, "Five Strides on the Banked Track."

Minato: At that time, I do remember you were all over the media.

Calvello: That's because some of the prima donnas wouldn't do any publicity. Seltzer always sent me out, and I always got good crowds for him. Just before we closed, I went to Arizona and did 27 interviews in one week. Can you imagine that. Because of all the publicity, the arena was sold out. I'm a fanatic about the sun and on the last day, I finally got out by the pool. The kids came down the same day and there I was laying in the sun. Lydia Clay walked over and said, "So this is what you've been doing all goddamned week, laying by the pool." I nearly killed her.

Minato: This was also the time that Roller Derby began attracting record crowds. We began hearing about huge salaries being paid to the skaters. Was that true?

Calvello: I don't know what Joanie and Charlie made, but not me. Charlie probably made a lot because he had Seltzer intimidated. Joanie is a very smart businesswoman and I know she made a lot. But more power to them. I was the one that got the shaft. Remember, when we skated the Bombers, I was paid maybe two weeks out of the month. And it was never full pay, which wasn't anything anyways. I signed more autographs in the unemployment line

than I ever did at a game. It was embarrassing. But in the end, I was never ashamed of anything I did. A lot of people used to look down on us and call Derby and Wrestling "Gutter Sports." We used to give a lot of entertainment to a lot of people.

Minato: E.G. Miller told me he knew Derby was big when Barbara Streisand spotted Danny Reilly at her concert. She identified him to the audience as her favorite skater and then serenaded him.

Calvello: And it wasn't just celebrities, it was the doctors, the lawyers, the teachers. Everyone was going. They loved it.

Minato: In the early '70s, Seltzer tried a national expansion where all teams would play both home and away games. What was that like?

Calvello: It was very difficult. We had to drive everywhere, so we went 50-75,000 miles each year. We'd skate, then have to leave the same night. I usually had to leave earlier to go do interviews in the next city. We saw a lot of motels, diners, and laundromats. When people asked when I'd slept, I'd tell them when I was driving. (laughs)

Minato: Despite the great crowds, Roller Derby closed in 1973. Why?

Calvello: I injured my knee and I went to Hawaii for rehabilitation and to relax and unwind. Christmas time comes and I see Joanie there. She tells me that they skated in Fargo, North Dakota. Seltzer had a meeting and that night, just like that, they told everyone they were closing. If I hadn't run into some of the skaters in Hawaii, I wouldn't have even known Roller Derby had closed.

In 1973, there was the oil crisis and gas rationing. We were on the road six months. There were four teams on the road and we drove everywhere. There were two tracks that had to be brought all over the United States and we couldn't get gas. I think Seltzer had some personal problems because he was getting a divorce. So he just claimed bankruptcy.

Jerry is a good promoter. Nothing against him being a good businessman. He just ran Roller Derby wrong in my opinion. From the beginning, he and O'Connell made up their minds that women didn't belong in the game. To this day, Seltzer is trying to start a Roller Derby, completely legitimate, without the women. It will never work. This is a true story. In Santa

Rosa, there was a game and it was a sold out house. The girls weren't able to get there for some reason and it was announced that only the men would skate. Ninety-percent of the audience walked out.

Minato: How did you get involved with Bill Griffiths and the league merger?

Calvello: I always wanted to go to Mardi Gras, so I went from Hawaii to New Orleans with three friends I'd met, two bartenders and a Roman Catholic priest (laughs). Griffiths made some sort of a deal with Seltzer to take some of the top skaters from the Derby like Joanie and O'Connell and pay them their salaries. He heard I was back and offered me the infield coaching position for the three international teams, Team Canada, the Latin Liberators, and the Tokyo Bombers. He paid me the most I ever got, 500 dollars a week. That only lasted about six weeks, then he got rid of all the Derby skaters. O'Connell and Joanie never wanted to skate with Griffiths anyway. They were so used to having their own way.

Minato: The Roller Games have been compared to the WWF in its almost circus-like presentation of the Derby. Did all the Derby skaters not like the style?

Calvello: Most of the skaters didn't, but whoever signs your paycheck, hey, you do what you're told. O'Connell had enough money, he didn't have to skate.

Minato: What was it like to have to coordinate a bunch of skaters who didn't speak English, specifically the Japanese team?

Calvello: It's just like they say, when you're making love to a foreigner, you don't have to talk (laughs). Skating is also an international language. Maybe one or two spoke English, but they were so disciplined and were so smart. It was an honor for them to skate and they enjoyed it so much. I learned a lot from them and it was a pleasure to work with them. They treated me with such respect. Skaters in this country started to take too much for granted. They weren't doing what they were supposed to. Boy, these kids, men and women made our skaters look sick. They hated to make mistakes and they did their job right. The competition was good for everyone. Don't get me wrong, I loved all the kids I was in charge of. But these kids were special. I really missed them when we shut down.

Minato: *Roller Games closed two years later for much the same reasons that Roller Derby folded. Did you feel it dying?*

Calvello: Yes. Griffiths lost many television stations. Roller Derby cannot survive without television. Overall, the crowds were getting smaller and smaller.

Minato: *In the mid '80s, Roller Derby had new management with something called RollerMania. Yet it didn't succeed.*

Calvello: Dave Lipschultz had bought the Bombers from Seltzer. He and the other promoters were all rock 'n' roll men. They could see the money in it. However, for a rock concert to be thought of as a success, you have to sell out every night. We went on a four day tour of New York in the fall of '87 and did well. Then we went on a summer tour of upstate New York and didn't draw anyone. Now we've skated in the dead of winter in 20 feet of snow and got sell outs every night, but you do not skate in the East or Midwest during the summer. Our audience goes on vacation and the people won't come. So the guys just gave up.

Minato: *What about the debacle Rock and RollerGames?*

Calvello: I was honored that they were trying to make so many Calvellos with all the crazy hair. I loved the rock and roll groups, the costumes, the productions, the beautiful bodies. I thought it was great. But it wasn't Roller Derby. I knew it wouldn't work. And I heard the producers got upset with each other, so things really got screwed up. You know how cute those cheerleaders were, with those gorgeous figures. You could have put them out there naked and people still would have rather seen Roller Derby.

Minato: *Just a few years ago in San Jose, there was a major push with a new league. What happened with that?*

Calvello: There was this guy names John Stevenson and this wrestling promoter from Florida, Patrick Schaeffer, who I heard stiffed a bunch of wrestlers there. They had us skate a bunch of games in San Jose Pleasanton, and they pulled the same crap about not letting Calvello and Weston skate. With our history, that would have meant something here. They thought we were too old, yet most of the girls they had skating were almost as old as us. I don't care if I'm '62, I can still skate. There were

some 18 year olds out there who couldn't even stand up. So there I was in the infield with the Dallas Bandits. It was sort of fun because I got to wear all this Fredericks of Hollywood stuff.

All the skaters had a meeting and I put my two cents in and told them that these promoters would make their tapes, they won't be able to sell them, and we'd never hear from them again. That's exactly what happened. I think the tapes played for a while in the East, but these Florida promoters couldn't even get them sold in Florida. But you know these guys didn't know what they were doing when they had the L.A. teams win up here. You don't do that in Northern California.

Minato: *Now you're involved with RollerJam. What are your expectations?*

Calvello: You saw the game, what do you think?

Minato: *They're a long way from national exposure.*

Calvello: Exactly, they don't really have a direction. There's no training center, so a lot of the skaters were really rusty. I'm scared that some of these kids might get so out of shape that when skating does make a come-back, they'll go out there and hurt themselves or someone else.

Minato: *Is it politics that keeps Sean Atkinson from skating? There's no doubt in my mind that he could create a revolution in the game. If the American public ever sees him, they're going to go out of their minds.*

Calvello: Sean is the golden boy. His grandfather trained me. I skated with his father. He's better than both of them. Everyone still talks about O'Connell, Weston, and me. The quickest way to make everyone forget about O'Connell is to put Sean on the Bombers. It should be his turn.

The problem with him is that, like Toughie, he gets carried away. But no one has ever had a serious talk with him about this. The top management should sit him down and tell him that his career will be over. He loves skating too much to ever consider being kicked out.

Minato: *Is there any woman on the horizon that a league can be built around?*

Calvello: I don't know of any. There are no training centers, and there are also things that can only be learned by skating in a game in front of an audience. I knew

how many minutes were left in a period, how many seconds in the jam. I studied the shadows on the track, and even knew when my girls were goofing off on the bench. The most important thing is that you learn to listen to the audience. You learn to use your head.

Minato: *How can Roller Derby be brought back?*

Calvello: First, I think it needs someone with vision to head it, like a Vince McMahon. Especially in this day and age with all the stress in the world, people need entertainment. It is a recession, but people still have money to go to the race track, to the bars and to baseball games. Do you know what it costs to go to a football game? Our little Roller Derby is only six dollars. That's heaven.

Minato: *If I were to wave a magic wand and make you the head of a Roller Derby league, what would you do?*

Calvello: Curtis, no one has ever asked my opinion on this. No one has every consulted me. It's sort of hurtful, because I know Roller Derby. I have a smart mind. I can just look at a skater and tell you what to do with them, but no one has ever asked. The first thing I'd do is get television. Roller Derby must have television. Then, before you skate, you get every skater there, every referee, everyone, and you make them all feel as if they're a part of it. Then you put the right people on the right teams and run right with no favoritism. You let the best skaters be the top stars. Much as people are starving for Roller Derby, if the right people aren't skating, it won't work. Naturally, I'd like to skate, but it's not in my hands. I've had 44 years on the track and if God wills it, maybe I can skate 50 years. Even if I'm not skating, I could be in the infield. I could teach the kids what I know.

Skating or non-skating, I just hope I can live to see it. All these kids that I love so much have wanted to be skaters all their lives. They want it so bad, but before you know it, their chance will be gone. I want derby to come back so they can see their dreams come true.

Minato: *And what about your dreams?*

Calvello: I want to be able to skate before a packed house one last time. And I'd like to draw one good paycheck. If I could do that, it would be the perfect ending.

DEAR UNCLE BRUCIE

The Torch Faithfully Responds to Needy Readers' Questions

By Bruce Mitchell, Torch Columnist

"Dear Abbie, Dear Abbie
You are what you are and you ain't what
you ain't."

-John Prine

"There is a Latin expression, *flagranté delicto*—in the heat of passion. The passion of a wrestling match can mean love. The basic down-to-earth, sensual humanness about the body. I think that's a lot of what the appeal is. It can be tied down to a certain degree of our animal instincts."

-Nick Bockwinkel, *Main Event, the World of Professional Wrestling*, Roberta Peters, 1979.

Fistdrops. Stuff piledrivers. Hotshots. Chair shots, Flying bodypresses. Flying elbows. Vertical suplexes. Bodyslams on concrete. Punches. Kicks.

These are all the stuff of the world's oldest profession, uh, sport. These integral facets of the Sport of Kings and the King of Sports, Professional Wrestling, have one thing in common. They can hurt. Like hell. Pro wrestlers run risks that the average person never has to consider. At any moment during a match a wrestler can sustain a painful injury. Broken fingers. Broken legs. Broken hips. Broken ribs. These are as nothing, however, compared to the most painful injuries of all.

Broken hearts.

Pain can come in many forms. Not only can those of us without frontal lobes that look like bookshelves or backs awash with acne have our hearts ripped out and our nerve-endings scraped raw and our sensitive feelings cast aside like they were nothing by some faithless, heartless haridan who would rather spend her days laughing and making fun of me in front of all her snooty friends, that bitch... uh,...

wait a minute... Where was I?

Oh yeah.

Wrestlers are people, too, you know. Even the Warlord. They have feelings and emotions. The lot of a wrestler is not just night after night of packed arenas, millions of rabid, devoted fans who hang on their every word or gesture, more money than anyone can spend, glamorous women dogging their every step, and the respect and admiration of the public at large. Yeah, right.

Anyway, wrestlers can have their hearts broken by women much like the one who never returns my phone calls and acts like I don't even exist even after all the time we spent together and... oh, sorry. Got carried away again. Luckily, though, *Pro Wrestling Torch*, the same publication that knows, yes—no reason to be ashamed of it—the love and admiration of every single person in this business, now presents yet another public service to the industry. Thanks to the fact that the *Torch* has been literally jammed to the rafters with thousands of heartfelt letters from the shattered remnants of those who have only one hope: the hardboiled, yet good-hearted advice of your Uncle Brucie—you, the faithful *Torch* readers will get to eavesdrop as pain is alleviated and lives are made better. These people have problems. We are here to help them become self-actualized and to get in touch with their inner-child.

This feature is here to ease the suffering and pain of the correspondents who wrote these authentic epistles of woe to their favorite Uncle. Don't believe the following pleas for help were actually written by anyone but Yours Truly.

The *Torch Annual V* makes the following guarantee: If any of the following

letters seem to have "predetermined finishes," simply circle the offending missive, cut it out, and send it in care of Mr. Apter to *Pro Wrestling Illustrated Weekly* to receive a free year's subscription to their innovative publication. See, now you know these are all real!

Now, let's see what was in Uncle Brucie's mailbag this summer!

Dear Uncle Brucie,

My husband Davey Boy won't make love to me anymore because he says I remind him too much of my "greasy, cross-eyed brother" Bret. I told him if he was a "man" instead of a "boy" we would never have this problem. I don't know, Unc, working out with the boys in Dad's dungeon just does not seem to relieve the tension. I miss those braids against my face as we bore on, waves beating against the sand...

Married to a Dog

Dear Bitch,

Sounds like he's one Dog that needs to be fixed.

Dear Uncle Brucie,

Ever since I got this new job, I've been pursuing the apple of my eye, but I just can't seem to get him to notice me. I have gone on television, on the radio, through the mail, and even on 900 lines to express my deep feelings for this kiss stealing, wheeling dealing, jet flying son of a gun. He would be so much better off with me. I understand what he needs, his Nature, better than he does. Gosh, I bought his belt from him, at retail no less. Why, I've even built my entire promotion around him and he is not even here yet! You know, he has the loveliest long blonde hair.

The problem, Brucie, is that this Boy won't give me a chance to hook 'em up. He prefers to spend all of his time with that double-breasted, greasy pompadoured fast talking Yankee pretty boy from New York. The only thing they have in common is that they both like to ride around in limousines. This Daddy's Boy is well-known for sweet talking people, then casting them aside like yesterday's Rooster. I, on the other hand, truly care about the Boy and would really, really respect him and not treat him the way I do Brian Pillman and Arn Anderson. What can I do, Uncle Brucie, to get him to notice me?

The Big Cowboy

Dear WCW Vice President Bill Watts,
Offer him a three year guaranteed contract
for a million dollars per annum.

Dear Uncle Brucie,

I think anyone who writes to you whining about their so-called problems is a disgrace to the hundred year old tradition of this man's sport. Would Strangler Lewis, Bronco Nagurski, Dick the Bruiser, or Mr. Wrestling II ever write some sob sister columnist crying about some "emotional" hurt? Nah, they just busted heads. In my day we drew money, no sissy high spots or tumbling acts or blah, blah, blah, blah, blah...

We Drew Money

Dear Ole,
Screw you.

Dear Uncle Brucie,
Ug good. Pug good. Brucie bad.
The Dead Ringer

Dear Dead,
Ugh.

Dear Dave,

Whatever happened to Haystacks Calhoun, Bad Leroy Brown, Rick McGraw, Adrian Adonis, Scott Irwin, Brute Bernard, Marty O'Neil, and Jay Youngblood?
Sir

Dear Sir,
They died

Dear Uncle Brucie,

I'm really confused. The promoters put together a little angle where the champ would claim to be my wife's old boyfriend and they would show fake pictures of them doing dirty stuff like drinking a glass of wine or sitting on a couch together. I was supposed to beat him up, win the championship, and live happily ever after.

Well, it all went according to plan. Got the belt, got the payday, everything's cool. One thing, though—where the hell is my wife? Was she really this guy's girlfriend or something? Why doesn't he brag about it?

Now my belt's gone, my leg hurts, and my house is cleaned out. I thought the good guy always won in the end. As you well know, Brucie, my bosses are known for their realistic angles, but enough's enough. Which part of this is "real" and which part



"MACHO MAN" RANDY SAVAGE

is a "work?"

The Lovely Randy Man

Dear Man,
About the Macho Liz Lady, as a wise man once said, everything you see actually happens. Sorry about the leg, though.

Dear Uncle Brucie,

Just a creamy little note to let all the members of the team now that Mel and I are enjoying our sabbatical down here in Argentina. The beaches are just fabulous, what with all the native boys in their leather thongs running around. Our good friend Adolf sure knows how to show a fellow a good time. See you soon!

Love Uncle Terry

Dear Uncle Brucie,

We need some help with this math problem. How much total money would twenty wrestlers in five years make on a WCW incentive plan that pays everyone a thousand dollars or more bonus each time a house show made a net profit of fifty thousand dollars on a PPV and had a 1.5 buyrate.

All the WCW wrestlers

Dear All,
None.

Dear Uncle Brucie,

All these hillbilly rednecks won't send no money so I can get my heart fixed. I have to use those ol' generic heart pills. This mountain is too smoky for mah clogged up lungs. And my hip hurts real bad. I'm just a poor old crippled up retired rassler. Can you help me?

Mr. Ron Wright

Dear Mr. Wright,

The lack of medical and retirement benefits for pro wrestlers is a serious issue for the sport of professional wrestling. We at the Torch want to do our part in this matter.

The Torch has now set up a special fund for readers who would like to assist Mr. Wright. Please send cash, checks, or Ginnie Mae account numbers to:

Mr. Wright Heart Fund
c/o Bruce C. Mitchell
Pro Wrestling Torch
P.O. Box 201844
Minneapolis, MN 55420

Thanks for caring!

Dear Uncle Brucie,

Could you talk to Uncle Bill for me? I led the parade for his return to pro wrestling—"the greatest thing in the history of the business." Now he won't return my calls. All I want is a job. I'm sorry that I had that tantrum at the Sportatorium and my shoulder is in great shape. He gave cousin Erik a job and I'm more of a son to him than that deflated football. Please, please, please—I'm sick of Memphis. It's not fair here. Lawler won't let me be King and they make me "date" all the valets.

P.S.—If you see my ex-wives, tell them the checks are in the mail.

Hot Stuff

Dear Eddie,

Sorry, Uncle Cowpie says no dice. However, he wants to know if Tommy would come in and work a program with Ox Baker. He'll pay \$50 a shot, no expenses.

Dear Uncle Brucie,

Tradition, excellence, the essence of showmanship—these are the elements of the Universal Wres... Uh oh, is that a siren?

Gotta go!

Herb

Dear Uncle Brucie,

C'mon, tell us the truth. You know both guys. Who's nicer, *Torch* columnist Mark Madden or *Torch* publisher Wade Keller?

Just Wondering

Dear Just,

It's a tie.

Dear Uncle Brucie,

I forgot. After my marriage to Eddie ended, who did I start dating?

Deucie

Dear Debbie,

You have yourself confused with First Lady Missy Hyatt again. In your case, it's nobody's business.



MADUSA (Photo by Wade Keller)

Dear Uncle Brucie,

Whatever happened to me?

Murray Hodgson

Dear Murray,

Now, there's an interesting question.

Dear Uncle Brucie,

In one year, I lost my radio show, got it back, lost my newsletter, got it back, lost my mailing list, lost my radio show again, got it back, lost Mike Tenay's radio show, and got challenged to a match by a clown

named Vicious Vince. Frankly, I need some money to stabilize this nonsense. Can you help me?

John from New York

Dear Mr. Arezzi,

Readers interested in helping John should send cash to the same address listed for Mr. Wright.

Hey Bill,

Ric Flair. NAH NA NAH NA NAH NAAH.

Vince

Dear Vince,

Phil Mushnick. NANNY NANNY BOO BOO...

Bill

Dear Bruce,

I am a devoted WCW fan. I have not missed a show on TBS in 12 years. I have ordered every pay-per-view. I have even travelled to see WCW house shows (five just this month). My question is, why won't TBS wise up and get rid of that Jim Herd and hire Cowboy Bill Wa... What? They did? When? Uh, never mind.

Concerned Reader

Dear Brucie,

See if you can solve this brain teaser: Why would high flyer Chris Benoit want to work for WCW after seeing what happened to Brian Pillman and Jushin Liger?

Albert Einstein

Dear Al,

Because WCW is the Real Deal.

Dear Uncle Brucie,

I have a consumer complaint. I called the WCW hotline: 1-900-909-RIP-OFF for satisfaction and the only one who jerked (got) off was Jim Ross.

Hardcore

Dear Hard,

Sucker.

Dear Uncle Brucie,

Can you list all of the WCW Television champions in order and the dates and locations where they won the titles?

A Real Fan

Dear Real,

No.



LEX LUGER (Photo by Wade Keller)

Dear Uncle Brucie,

Whatever happened to the Road Warriors?

The Legion of Doom

Dear Animal and Hawk,

They went to the WWF last I heard. Remember them?

Dear Uncle Brucie,

Give me a count. Are we on?

Hulk Hogan

Lex Luger

Sid Justice

Dear Jerks,

Not right now, thank God.

Confidential to MM: Bumsburgh, Pa.

Don't worry. I'm sure she noticed. You mentioned her in every column. Shave your back, learn how to use a knife and fork, and I'll bet Missy will go out with you.

Bruce Mitchell is a monthly columnist for Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly. Mitchell is a freelance writer from Greensboro, N.C. who teaches elementary school full-time.

THE 2ND COMING OF THE DREAM

For 18 Months, What Kind of Legacy Has Rhodes Built?

By Eric Krol, Torch Columnist

Oh my god, referee Nick Patrick has been knocked down! Ric Flair charges at Sting... he goes over the top rope! It's breaking down... Sting hits a Stinger splash and covers Flair. Pee Wee Anderson runs in and 1-2-3!! Sting has regained the WCW World Title! But wait, the first referee gives the belt back to Flair. Apparently, Patrick saw Flair go over the top rope. He'll win by disqualification.

•January 20, 1991, University of Illinois-Chicago Pavilion, Chicago, Ill., before 1300 fans.

Albeit somewhat auspiciously, thus began the second reign of Dusty Rhodes as booker of World Championship Wrestling. Rhodes, real name Virgil Runnels, officially took over as scriptmaster of WCW on Jan. 20, 1991, the day after leaving the World Wrestling Federation. Rhodes had given notice to the WWF the previous November, then blew off a feud with "Million Dollar Man" Ted DiBiase at Royal Rumble '91.

Rhodes was coming back to a company that had arguably reached an all-time low as far as wrestling product and booking creativity were concerned. Indeed, the November 1990 Clash of the Champions featured such wrestlers as the Motor City Madman and the Nightstalker. Ric Flair vs. Butch Reed headlined the event. The show was, at the time, the lowest-rated Clash ever, garnering a mere 3.7 ratings. The ensuing pay-per-view was built around one of the most ridiculous angles of all-time, the Black Scorpion-Sting saga. Ole Anderson, nick-named by many "Oldie" Anderson, fell to the chopping block as a result of the weak standing of the company. Anderson had initially given the company a direction with the Dudes with Attitudes vs. Horsemen feud, but then ventured off

on the Scorpion angle without knowing how it would end while mispromoting a potential money-match between Sid Vicious and lead babyface Sting.

Rhodes had previously booked the then-National Wrestling Alliance for former owner Jim Crockett for many years,



DUSTY RHODES

leading the company to its peak of success with innovative booking and money-making ventures such as the Great American Bash tours which filled NWA arenas. The promotion benefited greatly from the national explosion of wrestling during the mid-1980s. However, as most wrestling historians know, Rhodes suffered burnout from being at the helm too long.

The booking became stale and repetitive, except for the quick series of heel and face turns which left casual fans completely bewildered. Rhodes's burnout, which led to (and in many ways fostered) an overpush of himself, combined with losing talent to McMahon, culminated in the demise of the NWA during 1987-88. Media mogul Ted Turner bought the flailing company ostensibly to provide cheap programming which garnered decent ratings for superstation WTBS. By the time Rhodes was given the boot in late-1988, the company lacked any direction, much of the talent had defected, and the headline feud featured the recently-turned-heel Road Warriors against Big Dust over the six-man belts. A succession of bookers and booking committees that only wrestling trivia buffs can remember followed, leading to the firing of Ole Anderson, which brings us to the present date of Jan. 20, 1991, the beginning of Rhodes's second tenure which continues to this day.

The Second Coming of the Dream has now lasted over 18 months, and despite serving under three different bosses, Rhodes, the great survivor, remains. Letters of thorns and roses have filled the wrestling media pages and airwaves concerning Rhodes's performance. However, to come close to fairly evaluating Rhodes's performance, an in-depth analysis was necessary. Much of the analysis is subjective, while much is raw data from the *Wrestling Observer* and *Pro Wrestling Torch* processed into a comprehensible form.

JANUARY 1991

There exists some belief that Rhodes was secretly calling some shots since giving notice to Titan and subsequent to the firing of Ole Anderson. Rhodes's fat was certainly thrown into the fire immediately. Rhodes had to come up with a line-up for the Feb. 24 *WrestleWar* pay-per-view event. In addition, a Clash was set for Jan. 30.

"Clash XIV: Dixie Dynamite" drew a 3.9 rating and a 5.8 share. Rhodes replaced Paul E. Dangerously as the color commentator for the telecast and offended the sensibilities of just about everyone watching. Rhodes heavily pushed himself throughout the telecast and gave a huge self-serving speech to let everyone know he was back. The show had some good action, including a hot brawl between Sting and Lex Luger against Doom and a good

match pitting Barry Windham & Arn Anderson vs. The Youngbloods. However, a decidedly misogynistic angle was played out as Dangerously did the job for Missy Hyatt in a battle-of-the-sexes arm wrestling schtick. Rhodes's comments lit up the TBS switchboard, to be sure. In the main event, Ric Flair fought Scott Steiner to a 24:25 draw in a disappointing match rated **3/4. Steiner, who was considered by many to be the future savior of WCW was reportedly nervous for the match. Steiner would not be given a chance to recover

REPORT CARD:Dusty Rhodes

TELEVISION SHOWS	C+
BUYRATES/CLASH RATINGS	C
HOUSE SHOW ATTENDANCE	D
OVERALL PRODUCT	C

Issued by the Torch Academy of Judging Bookers: President, Eric Krol



BIG JOSH, CREATED UNDER RHODES'S LEADERSHIP
(By Wade Keller)

WrestleWar was headlined by match-of-the-year candidate WarGames, where Sid Vicious pinned Brian Pillman. Pillman was the recipient of two potato powerbombs by Sid and was legitimately hurt. The show received a 7.9 META reader score and earned a 1.2 buyrate. Stan Hansen battled Big Van Vader to a double-countout in a match featuring the top foreign wrestlers of All Japan and New Japan wrestling. Luger pinned Dan Spivey in an excellent U.S. Title match. Vicious calling spots to Rick Steiner was picked up by the camera. Meanwhile, Rhodes did color commentary, but mellowed a bit. One of Rhodes's favorites, Nikita Koloff, returned and attacked Luger with the U.S. belt, turning heel.

Rick & Scott Steiner won the tag titles from the Freebirds on Feb. 18 with an airdate of Mar. 9. However, the Freebirds did not win the belts until Feb. 24 at the live WrestleWar pay-per-view event, exposing Rhodes's lack of concern or lack of knowledge about the more sophisticated wrestling media, namely radio shows, newspaper columnists, and of course newsletters. A sign of being out of touch or a sign of lack of respect: take your pick.

In other WCW happenings, Matt Borne arrived and Rhodes turned him into "Big Josh." WCW wrestlers talked about Rhodes during broadcasts and Gordon Solie called the *Omni* "The House that Rhodes Built." Rhodes changed Southern Boys' name to Young Pistols in an effort to change their image. Their home state was changed to Wyoming. Another Rhodes cronie, Sir Oliver Humperdink, arrived with absolutely no impact. Rhodes called Humperdink "Big Daddy Dink" but never explained the name change and announcers have to continually refer to him by both names because of fans' familiarity with Humperdink. Mr. Hughes, one of the

only black wrestlers in WCW, became a heel bodyguard for Alexandra York. Rhodes promoted Flair vs. Sting in cage



FREEBIRDS AND BIG BADDY DINK ENTOURAGE, ONE OF MANY FREEBIRD FACELIFTS
(Photo by Wade Keller)

matches with El Gigante as special referee to the main events. Gigante counts Sting pinning Flair unofficially on television.

MARCH 1991

WCW co-promoted Starrcade in Tokyo, the largest show of the year in Japan Mar. 21 at the Egg Dome. The events drew over 60,000 fans, a \$3.2 million dollar gate. Highlights from the show included the Steiners winning the IWGP Tag Team Titles from Hiroshi Hase & Kensuke Sasaki, Great Muta pinning Sting, and Tatsumi Fujinami defeating Ric Flair to win the NWA Heavyweight Title. The change was not recognized as a WCW Title Change in Japan, causing ambiguity between the NWA and WCW Titles. Rhodes's influence in screw-job finishes somehow infiltrated

FEBRUARY 1991

After the Clash, WCW promoted WrestleWar. In doing so, WCW ran commercials which used the slogan: "We've Declared War," a questionable tactic when one considers that the Persian Gulf War is going on at the time.

the Japanese borders. After the referee was knocked down, Flair inadvertently jumped over the top rope and later was pinned by Fujinami. The first referee reversed the decision of the referee who counted the pinfall. However, fans were not told this and Fujinami left with the title. Japan recognized Fujinami as the NWA Champion while Flair was still WCW Champion in the U.S. It took several days for the Japanese press to report on the controversy. The event aired on pay-per-view in an experimental pre-taped, two-hour form at \$9.95. Many critics believed WCW should have aired this event as a Clash on TBS to give WCW a major league, international image in front

of a larger audience.

In other WCW happenings, WCW introduced post-produced crowd noise onto their TV programs, a sign of Rhodes's WWF influence. However, the crowd effects were artificial sounding, much more so than the WWF's. Owen Hart, perhaps underutilized by WCW, ended a brief stint working in WCW. Meanwhile, Buddy Landel was fired for blowing his nose on a hotel manager while on the road. Longtime announcer Bob Caudle left the promotion.

APRIL 1991

Sid Justice gave his notice during the first week of the month. Vicious reportedly

wanted to take two months off during the summer and raise his salary from \$5,000 to \$8,000 per week. WCW and Vicious do not come to an agreement, so Vicious' disappears from WCW television programs. In return for showing up at the pay-per-view and agreeing to be pinned by El Gigante, Vicious was released from his contract early. Sid proved to be ineffective and uncooperative while he was with WCW and thereafter in the WWF.

Rhodes tried to inject some life into WCW going into the summer months through new hires. Brad Armstrong debuted under the new guise of "Fantasia" while Billy Jack Haynes was hired and became "Black Blood." In the following

TELEVISION ANALYSIS

When examining television ratings for a period of this great length, it is easy to not see the forest for the trees. This is especially true looking at the most recent few months of ratings. However, take a look at the entire chart (see pg. 4). Yes, it is full of peaks and valleys, but the ratings have not been that bad.

Indeed, Rhodes's second reign saw February ratings for the Saturday shows (the most important one for pay-per-view success and more important in the eyes of TBS) near the 3-level all month with a 3.4 rating achieved on Feb. 16. Ratings slipped slightly to the mid-2's, which is respectable, until the end of April 1991.

However, the bottom fell out in May, which is the worst possible time for it to happen. May is one of the four sweeps periods for television. Sweeps are the times when the ten o'clock news features raunchy, sensationalistic pieces to grab your attention because those ratings determine how much stations can charge for advertising time. In wrestling, WWF and WCW generally try to put good matches on television in an effort to get the maximum number of viewers, and hence, more ad revenue and better timeslots. Ratings for May 1991 fell from the 2.5-2.7 range to the 1.8-2.0 range. This was an all-time low for WCW at the time, only equalled by this May's fiasco. What is even more mysterious is that right after the sweeps period ended, ratings picked right back up to the mid-2 range again. WCW's ratings were once again horrible during sweeps this May, largely attributed to the change in format. My only theory on this dilemma is one of overkill. People are overwhelmed

during May, when the season finales of every series is running, news is saucier, and the choices on television are innumerable. With limited time, people choose programs other than wrestling. In the end, wrestling loses out, even if their shows are taped for later viewing which is not part of ratings.

Ratings crept back up in June, only to falter in July and early-August. Ratings for July used to be high for WCW because Rhodes promoted the Bash tour and gave away unheard of main events on television. In addition, titles frequently switched during the Bash tour and the only way to find out the latest news was to watch the shows. The actual Bash tour has lost its lustre, however, as the PPV is always the focal point. Ratings stabilized in the 2.4 to 2.8 range from mid-August until late-October, when they jumped again to the 3 level, including a 3.3 peak on Nov. 31. The increase not-so-coincidentally occurred at the time of Halloween Havoc, where Rick Rude debuted, and the addition of Ricky Steamboat, which took place at the Clash. This was a big shot in the arm to the company, and the ratings reflected it.

The new year brought solid ratings for the first three months, with ratings 2.5 and above. Kip Frey, getting comfortable in office, decided to change the Saturday night format to a WWF Prime Time-style format. They hyped the change on the shows for weeks. However, in a truly amazing turn of events, ratings dipped from a 2.8 on Mar. 21 to a 2.2 for the much-ballyhooed new format. Ratings never recovered, as they have stayed around a 2.0 for April, May, and June. The explanation is obvious—the new

format of the show bombed. The guest-host and talk-oriented deal dragged on. This came at an inopportune time because of the May sweeps and because it killed whatever momentum Dusty had built up in the company since October. By the time June rolled around, WCW Saturday Night drew its worst rating ever, with a 1.6 on June 20.

One other aspect not reflected directly in ratings is the sameness of all the television shows. Watts addressed that issue and beginning in late-August changed formats of some of the programs.

WCW TV ratings will not increase, though, until they give the viewer a reason to watch from week to week. The theory that putting main event quality matches on TV will draw viewers is a false one. It seems as if Rhodes gets to the TV tapings and randomly puts members of the Dangerous Alliance against a member of Sting's Squadron. While the matches may be entertaining, they all end the same way, with a run-in DQ. Remember Rhodes's first reign when fans started looking toward the locker rooms instead of looking at the ring when a face was attacked? In addition, matches are not billed as important and are certainly not referred to from week-to-week. WCW needs to shoot episodic TV. Storylines need to develop from show to show. When an angle is shot, it needs to be mentioned and mentioned again, driving home its importance to the average fans. Using the television to set up matches for future programs only helps to hook the viewer, who then cannot help but get interested in the product and attend house shows. Bill Watts was famous for this in the UWF. Watts is now in charge.

weeks, over a dozen new wrestlers debuted. Steve Austin with valet Vivacious Veronica arrived, along with P.N. News, who got over tremendously at first. Following them were Johnny B. Badd, Oz, and Bill Kazmaier. The only one with long-term impact was Austin, and the only other acquisition that remains is Badd.

Rhodes showed his inability to



BLACK BLOOD, A CHARACTER CREATED BY RHODES (Photo by Wade Keller)

introduce new talent effectively. One thing Rhodes did not adopt from his stay in the WWF was their method of introducing talent. The WWF introduced talent with vignettes on television which air weeks before a wrestler actually wrestles. Wrestlers also try out their gimmicks in non-taped matches in the WWF to test crowd reaction. Rhodes chose often to have his new characters wrestle their first match on live Clashes. Such is either arrogance that none of his ideas would fail or ignorance that such introductions can flop as severely as the Ding Dongs did. With the vignettes, the character has a chance to get over with the WWF fans before their debut. Above all, the wrestler is brought along slowly. In addition, an old wrestling adage says never bring more than one or two new names in at once. WCW broke those rules, cramming the intros of the wrestlers into a small span of time. Most of the wrestlers were comic-book-like characters, such as P.N. News, who got over at first, but grew old quickly and was limited in his abilities. Cheap talent keeps even cheap seats empty.

MAY 1991

The fight between the WWF and WCW for arena exclusivity began. WCW wrote letters to several arenas threatening legal action unless WCW was permitted to run events in arenas currently only renting to the WWF. Most of the arenas were either run by Spectacor Management Group of Philadelphia or were municipally owned arenas. The battle had the potential to affect over twenty markets. The battle was initially limited to St. Louis, Oakland, and New Jersey's Meadowlands Arena. The WWF had already pulled out of the Meadowlands due to the arena granting dates to WCW. WCW was given a date in St. Louis at The Arena on June 14 and the WWF responded by pulling out of the building. WCW was given a date in Oakland on July 27 but the WWF booked a show in nearby San Francisco the day before. It became apparent WCW did not have the fan interest in these areas to draw in the buildings, thus they did not come close to outdrawing and the battle died a muffled death. WCW was booted from Oakland Coliseum after July, St. Louis Arena after October, and the new Charlotte Coliseum after August. WCW lost and lost big.

Rhodes added "Control Center" segments to his TV formats, bringing a much-needed formatted segment to hype SuperBrawl on pay-per-view. The repetition and super-hyping of upcoming pay-per-views by the WWF appeared to be successful.

SuperBrawl ended up garnering a 1.0 percent buyrate with a 7.0- META reader score with Tatsumi Fujinami vs. Ric Flair on top. The Freebirds won the vacant U.S. Tag Team Titles from the Young Pistols, then three squash matches damaged the event. The Jim Herd brainchild, Oz, debuted with his manager the Wizard from the Emerald City. A skit, embarrassing wrestling fans in all 50 states, saw the Tin Man, Scarecrow, Cowardly Lion, Dorothy, and even a monkey. Then Barry Windham defeated Brian Pillman in a taped-fist match, Vicious showed up and willingly lost to El Gigante, the Steiners fought Sting & Luger in an excellent match, Bobby Eaton beat Arn Anderson for the TV Title, and Flair pinned Fujinami with a fist of tights for leverage. The later-half of the event saw some of the most memorable wrestling action in the country in 1991.

WCW TELEVISION RATINGS

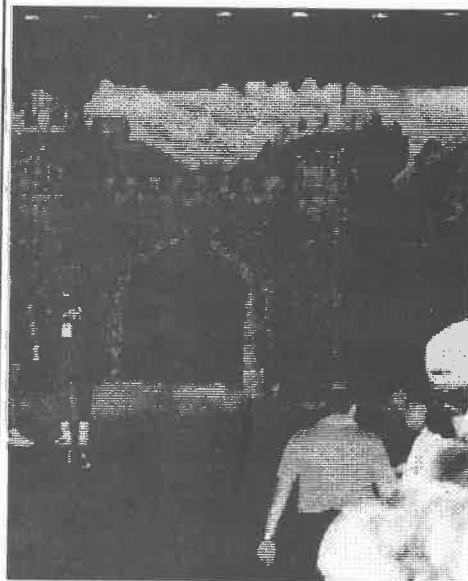
Mo./Yr.	WCW Sat.	Main Event
Feb. '91	2.8	2.9
Mar. '91	2.7*	2.9*
Apr. '91	2.5	2.5
May '91	1.9	2.0*
June '91	2.3	2.6
July '91	2.3	2.2
Aug. '91	2.4	2.3
Sept. '91	2.6	2.5
Oct. '91	2.7	2.1
Nov. '91	3.2*	2.5*
Dec. '91	2.8*	2.3*
Jan. '92	3.0*	2.6*
Feb. '92	2.6	2.4
Mar. '92	2.7*	2.9*
Apr. '92	2.2	2.1*
May '92	2.1	2.2
June '92	1.9	2.0

* indicates incomplete ratings information was used for the average rating given for that month.

In other events, Rhodes changed Ricky Morton into Richard Morton, adding him to the "York Foundation." And who can forget Pillman, while wearing a chicken suit, attacking Barry Windham to build up their feud. Rhodes had P.N. News on his "Bull Drop Inn" segment on TBS.

JUNE 1991

Six minutes of television time each week was dedicated to promoting a trio called "The Desperadoes." Black Bart,



THE ELABORATE SET MADE FOR "OZ" (Photo by Wade Keller)

Dead-Eye Dick (Randy Culley, formerly Moondog Rex), and Dutch Mantel who ran around Western settings doing slapstick comedy. The trio then rejected a \$300 a night guarantee and thus, the whole gimmick was dropped. Finally, Rhodes aired some videos to attempt to get characters over before they actually wrestle, but once again, something Rhodes touched turned to coal.

DUSTY-SPEAK

On his boss, Bill Watts: "I've seen the Cowboy out here and he's gained some weight but he looks good."

On the real date of SuperBrawl II: "Is it really February 29 or March 1-A?"

On partying: "If Ricky Steamboat wins the U.S. Title, I'm gonna get red-eyed and rowdy all night long."

On his retirement (Oct. '91): "I've been dormant too long."

On raising his son: "I stopped trying to intimidate that boy (Dustin) since he was 12."

On disciplining his grown son: "If he lets me down, I'm takin' him out to the barn and puttin' a boot to his butt."

On his vocabulary: "Maybe I shouldn't spout out some of those nasty words, but that's Dusty Rhodes, the American Dream."

On a "youthful-retirement": "My ol' body just wore out. I'm still a young man."

On his color commentating abilities: "I wouldn't say I'm a Frank Gifford or a John Madden or even a God-don Solie. But I think I can give fans an 'In-sight' based on 21 years in the business."

On the fans: "I know the wrestling fans want to give back a lot to Dusty Rhodes, the American Dream, but they don't have to."

On Japanese women's reaction to him: "I said, 'I'm Dusty Rhodes, the American Dream.' They bowed and went about their business."

On black women accompanying Diamond Dallas Page to the ring: "Some good lookin' brown sugar."

On wooing women: "(Ric Flair), you can talk about satin sheets. You can talk about limousines. But you can also talk about every woman you've had, I've had three or four times."

On handling himself: "I know she (Baby Doll) ain't woman enough to handle this man."

On the weather: "It's hot, hot, hot in public if you weeeelll."

On violence: "Violence for violence's sake and an eye for an eye."

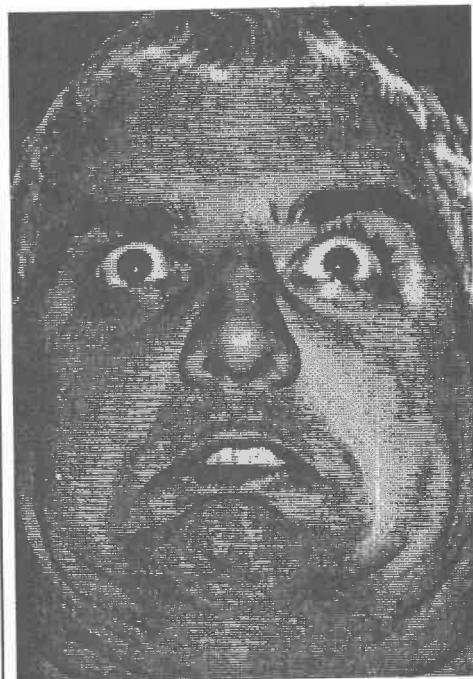
On commodities: "Sting is probably one of the hottest commodities in this sport. I know what it feels like to be there."

"Clash XV: Knoxville USA" drew a 3.9 rating and a 6.7 share, tying for the second-lowest rating ever. Drawing a 6.6 META reader score, in this show Rhodes somehow packed three months worth of angles into a two-and-a-half hour program, resulting in a bunch of rushed angles. The following angles were packed into the program: The Black Blood vs. Big Josh feud was established, Dangerously rapped Jason Hervey over the head with a phone, Hughes attacked Dustin Rhodes, News started a feud with Johnny B. Badd, Pillman lost a loser-leaves-town match, Koloff attacked Sting, Luger beat Muta to earn a shot at the World Title, Morton turned on longtime partner Robert Gibson, Hardliners attacked the Steiners, and Flair won a two-out-of-three falls match over Eaton in merely 14:25. The company may have reaped the benefits from these angles had they been spaced out, but instead they were all a blur.

In other events, Rhodes faced a setback, although surprisingly not self-induced, when Scott Steiner tore a bicep in a match against Rick Steamboat. Some would say, though, had Rhodes paid more attention to alleged steroid abuse in WCW, that bicep would not have torn as easily. Rhodes took advantage of the injury by claiming the Hardliners injured Steiner's arm. Rhodes also promoted Pillman under the pathetic "Yellow Dog" guise. In Florida, when Windham became the "Yellow Dog" in the mid-80s, there were a series of well-explained events leading up to the gimmick which logically led to Windham returning under the "Yellow Dog" disguise. In this case, no heel ever mocked Pillman as being a "yellow dog" before he returned as the Dog, as was done in the original Florida incident, thus rendered the gimmick senseless. Just like the Dog gimmick, Mr. Hughes was a rehash from the past. Hughes, of course, paralleled the Bubba Rogers gimmick.

JULY 1991

Ric Flair fired! Many could not believe it. WCW somehow stole the spotlight away from the WWF's exploitation of the Gulf War with something, considered in wrestling circles possibly the most stupid move possible. July 1, for what WCW embarrassingly said was failure to come to a contract agreement, Flair left. Flair had been making \$750,000 a year and WCW



DUSTY RHODES: A CLOSE-UP

(Photo by Gary Kamensack)

wanted to cut that nearly in half for three years. Flair turned down the offer, was fired before his current contract expired as a result of it, and was stripped of the WCW Title.

That occurred just two weeks before WCW's major pay-per-view, the Great American Bash. In Baltimore at the Bash, and at many arenas around the country, "We Want Flair" chants filled arenas.

The Bash drew a 0.9 buyrate and was universally panned by fans, receiving a 2.1 META reader score. Murphy's Law that anything that can go wrong will hold true. The Bash's scaffold match ended, not with someone falling off the scaffold as was advertised, but with a flag being captured on the scaffold. Oz wrestled. Dustin Rhodes pinned everyone in a six-man tag team match. El Gigante vs. One Man Gang was horrible. Barry Windham turned face and Lex Luger turned heel, but no one knew it. And, summing up the whole show, a Maryland state law prohibited another match from coming off as advertised. Scheduled was Dangerously & Anderson vs. Missy Hyatt & Rick Steiner, but mixed matches are illegal, so Missy was dragged away before the match began by the Hardliners. Rhodes, in his infinite attention to detail, debuted Harley Race as Luger's manager, but to no one watching or attending the Bash was that clear. The Bash made fans yearn for the days of the Black

WCW MAJOR EVENT STATISTICS

<u>Pay-Per-Views:</u>	<u>Buyrate:</u>	<u>Price:</u>	<u># of Buys:</u>	<u>Gross/WCW Share:</u>	<u>Main Event:</u>	<u>META 1-10:</u>
WrestleWar '91 (2-24-91)	1.2	\$19.95	155,000	\$3.0 million/\$1.25 million	WarGames	7.9
SuperBrawl I (5-19-91)	1.0	\$19.95	140,000	\$2.8 million/\$1.10 million	Flair-Fujinami	7.0
Great American Bash (7-14-91)	1.0	\$19.95	145,000	\$2.9 million/\$1.15 million	Luger-Windham	2.1
Halloween Havoc (10-27-91)	0.9	\$19.95	140,000	\$2.4 million/\$1.15 million	Luger-Simmons	5.5
Starrcade '91 (12-29-92)	1.2	\$19.95	140,000	\$2.8 million/\$1.00 million	BattleBowl	4.3
SuperBrawl II (2-29-92)	1.0	\$24.95	140,000	\$3.5 million/\$1.48 million	Sting-Luger	7.3
WrestleWar '92 (5-17-92)	0.6	\$24.95	115,000	\$2.9 million/\$1.22 million	WarGames	5.7
Beach Blast (6-20-92)	0.4	\$19.95	70,000	\$1.4 million/\$0.63 million	Sting-Jack	7.3

<u>TBS Clash of the Champions</u>	<u>Rating/Share</u>	<u>Total Homes Viewing:</u>	<u>Main Event:</u>	<u>META 1-10:</u>
XIV: Dixie Dynamite (1-30-91)	3.9/5.8	2.2 million	Ric Flair-Scott Steiner	4.2
XV: Knoxville, Tenn. (6-12-91)	3.9/6.7	2.2 million	Ric Flair-Bobby Eaton	6.6
XVI: Augusta, Ga. (9-5-91)	3.7/5.9	2.1 million	R. Steiner & Kazmaier-Anderson & Zbyszko	5.3
XVII: Savannah Ga. (11-19-91)	4.3/??	2.5 million	Lex Luger-Rick Steiner	7.2
XVIII: Topeka, Ks. (1-21-92)	3.7/5.5	2.2 million	Sting & Steamboat-Rude & Austin	6.5
XIX: Charleston, S.C. (6-22-92)	2.8/4.8	1.6 million	Steiners-Williams & Gordy	7.8

Scorpion.

The entire Flair fiasco raised an interesting Oliver Stone-like conspiracy theory. It had been common knowledge that Rhodes and Flair did not get along for years. The feud stemmed from late-'87 when TBS purchased Jim Crockett Promotions. Rhodes was on his way out since he had a few strikes against him as booker, mainly that he had bankrupted the company forcing Crockett to sell. The straw that broke the camel's back in the Flair-Rhodes relationship was when Rhodes ordered Flair to get pinned by Rick Steiner in five minutes. Granted, Steiner was the promotion's hottest babyface at the time, but Flair balked, push came to shove, and the end result was Rhodes cleaning toilets on WWF television.

The conspiracy suggested Rhodes intentionally mispromoted Flair (few believe Rhodes could promote someone as talented as Flair that poorly by accident unless you look at most of his other booking decisions). The mis-promotion of Flair led to an argument of: "We don't need Flair. Look at what he draws."

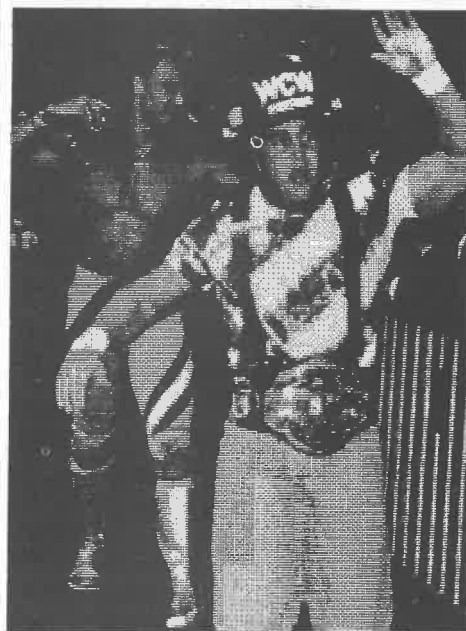
In other WCW events, Rhodes added Thomas Rich to the York Foundation, solidifying the Foundation as the "Rhodes Dog-House for the Underutilized, Overjobbed, and Past-Prime Wrestlers." WCW continued to advertise no-shows during the Bash tour, including Scott Steiner, Hyatt, Dangerously, Hughes, and Oz. In fact, in San Francisco, only one match took place as advertised.

AUGUST 1991

WCW spun their wheels during this month. After the failed Bash pay-per-view and failed Bash tour, Jack Petrick, president of WCW, required Herd and Rhodes to come up with written plans of attack for the remainder of the year. Nothing resulting from Petrick's decree was publicized thereafter.

The push for Ron Simmons began at the first TV tapings of the month. Simmons challenged Luger, but was attacked by Luger, Hughes, and Race. Windham ran in to make the save, which finally turned him face (no one realized he turned face at the pay-per-view). Later, Windham was attacked by Luger and friends and Simmons made the save. However, both faces were left lying. This established house shows with Windham & Simmons vs. Luger & Hughes.

In other WCW events, Rhodes introduced The American Patriots, which when history books on wrestling are written will battle Oz and the Ding Dongs for worst gimmick of this era. A tournament for the WCW Light Heavyweight Title began, but with jobbers like Joey Maggs and Johnny Rich, it was apparent no one took the division seriously, especially the booker. Rhodes-rival Eddie Gilbert was going to be brought in, but balked after finding out he would be brought in as a babyface. Gilbert, who went on to finish third in the *Pro Wrestling Torch* "1991 Independent



THE AMERICAN PATRIOTS, TODD CHAMPION & CHIP THE FIREBREAKER (Photo by Wade Keller)

Wrestler of the Year" category, believed Rhodes would bury him in a low-level face role. Rhodes promoted a series of "secret box" incidents, beginning with Abdullah the Butcher popping out of one and attacking Sting. Rhodes shoved the Patriots down fans' throats awarding them the U.S. Tag Team Titles. Sting won the U.S. Title defeating Steve Austin in tournament finals at the Omni. Rhodes promised that either Gang or Gigante would lose their hair, but when Gang lost the match, he received only a crew-cut. Again, Rhodes did not deliver as promised.

SEPTEMBER 1991

Clash XVI drew a 3.7 ratings and a 5.9 share, the lowest rated Clash of all sixteen. The show, which received a 5.3 META reader score, opened with Gigante winning a lackluster battle royal. The best match of the night came from Pillman, fresh off his "Yellow Dog" gimmick, pinning Bad Street (Brad Armstrong) in a semi-final match in the light-heavyweight tournament. The box angle continued with Sting getting attacked by Cactus Jack. Rhodes showed his genius at getting over new wrestlers by having Bill Kazmaier perform feats of strength. During the exhibition, The Enforcers attacked Kazmaier injuring his ribs. Rhodes introduced another cartoon character, Van Hammer, who defeated Terry Taylor in one minute, illustrating Rhodes's lack of respect for in-ring talent. In a positive move, a video was shown of Simmons visiting a boys' club to promote his match with Luger at the October pay-per-view. The main event lasted 3:33 as The Enforcers defeated Rick Steiner & Kazmaier.

In other WCW events, Tom Zenk became a trouble-shooting referee. A steering committee was born to help steer Rhodes, consisting of Jim Crockett, Jim Ross, Jim Barnette, Jim Herd, and Terry Allen (who, at the time, thought of changing his name to Jim). The Freebirds were recycled in a program against the Enforcers.

OCTOBER 1991

Paul E. Dangerously was fired from WCW by Jim Herd for allegedly spilling a high-profile angle concerning the reintroduction of the NWA Title to non-WCW personnel, namely Eddie Gilbert and the print media. The angle involved an NWA Tournament to be held in Memphis, possibly involving a merging of the USWA and NWA and WCW Titles. Nov. 11 was the date set for the Memphis television tapings. Jerry Jarrett cancelled the whole deal when word leaked. Jerry Lawler blamed Dangerously since Dangerously and Gilbert were good friends and Lawler dislikes Dangerously. Gilbert claimed Dangerously did not tell him of the angle, but Dangerously received the ax, removing him from his post as co-host of the TBS Saturday WCW show.

One theory was Lawler got cold feet,

realizing he would have to do the job at Starrcade, and doing the job for a one-time payoff in exchange for losing recognition in Memphis as World Champion would be penny wise and dollar foolish. He backed out and used Dangerously as the scapegoat.



CACTUS JACK, A SHOT-IN-THE-ARM HIRING BY RHODES (Photo by Wade Keller)

Jim Crockett greased the skids as media and fan pressure all but forced WCW to concede their point and rehire Dangerously. Dangerously returned and did an anti-Herd angle, making many believe the Dangerously firing was an angle all along. At times, Dangerously's comments seemed rather pointed and poignant, going beyond that of a simple angle all the way to sincerity.

In promoting Havoc's "Chamber of Horrors" match, never were the stipulations explained. The bout was to feature an electrified cage with "instruments of torture."

Havoc drew a 0.8 buyrate and a 5.5 META reader score. The Chamber of Horrors, including a live in-ring electrocution of Abdullah the Butcher, was a true embarrassment to pro wrestling. The bout also had face-painted ghouls at ringside and jobbers pop out of coffins inside the cage for no explicable reason. After being electrocuted accidentally by Cactus Jack, Abby beat up ringside ghouls, not even selling the voltage. Van Hammer

pinned Doug Somers in a squash, certainly the match most fans paid to see. Pillman pinned Morton to become WCW's first light-heavyweight champion. Rick Rude debuted with the returning Dangerously and the newly arrived Madusa. Rude earlier squashed Tom Zenk while wearing a mask while calling himself "The Halloween Phantom." Dangerously gave an interview-of-the-year bashing Jim Herd. The Enforcers pinned the Patriots and Luger beat Simmons two falls to one. The shocker was the clean pin by Luger over Simmons after a piledriver.

In other WCW events, Sting's contract was renewed at a three-year deal worth a reported \$500,000, \$600,000, and \$700,000 for respective years. Rhodes booked Kazmaier, not the least bit over with WCW fans, against Luger in main events. A solid music video was produced for television, unfortunately it was for Van Hammer.

NOVEMBER 1991

Clash XVII drew a 4.3 rating and a 7.2 META reader score. Following this event, many predicted the end of WCW's drought. The theme of the Clash involved Sting, who came out for an interview to find out who had been sending him gift boxes containing wrestlers and women. Madusa popped out of the final ornate box, but Sting was soon attacked by Luger. Eric Bischoff, pretending to be broadcasting from the hospitals in a neat CNN-like hookup, gave updates on Sting's condition. Later in the show, Sting returned to the arena just in time to prevent being counted out against Rude. Sting lost in five minutes to Rude when Rude pulled his trunks. In a surprisingly decent match, Cactus Jack pinned Van Hammer. In the match that stole the show, Ricky Steamboat returned debuting as Dustin Rhodes's partner and defeated The Enforcers to win the WCW Tag Team titles. In the main event, Luger pinned Rick Steiner after hitting him with the title belt. The major drawback to the show was Rhodes packing too much into it, thus seven of the nine matches each lasted less than five minutes.

In other WCW events, Eaton turned heel, the Freebirds turned face, Young Pistols turned heel, and Badd turned face (sort of). The "We Want Flair" chants continued. In possibly the best TV match of the year, Sting fought Cactus Jack in an awesome submit or surrender match.

WCW AVERAGE HOUSE SHOW ATTENDANCE

Month:	Avg. Attendance:
Feb. '91	2,600
Mar. '91	2,800 (Flair-Gigante series)
Apr. '91	2,700
May '91	1,600 (Flair-Sting repeats)
June '91	1,200 (Flair vs. many)
July '91	2,500
Aug. '91	1,900 (Luger-Windham)
Sept. '91	1,400
Oct. '91	2,100 (Luger-Simmons)
Nov. '91	1,300 (Luger vs. many)
Dec. '91	2,200 (less than 10 dates)
Jan. '92	2,100
Feb. '92	2,100
Mar. '92	2,700
Apr. '92	2,300
May '92	1,800
June '92	1,800

Luger nearly left WCW when his manager, Harley Race, was fired. He agreed to stay when WCW agreed to keep Race on payroll. WCW drew only 325 fans to a house show in Richmond, Va.

DECEMBER 1991

"Starrcade: BattleBowl: Lethal Lottery" broke Rhodes's record for most subtitles to a pay-per-view. The television leading up to Starrcade had little direction. The BattleBowl concept was promising, possibly leading to Rick Steiner vs. Scott Steiner or Sting teaming with Rick Rude since the teams were selected through supposed-random drawings. The closest thing to an intriguing match-up came when Hayes briefly battled Garvin. Most of the bouts on Starrcade were poor and the match-ups were so poor it was as if the names *were* randomly drawn, after all, no one could intentionally book such uninteresting matches. Liger was teamed with Kazmaier against Mike Graham & Dallas Page, showing a tremendous lack of respect for Liger. During Sting & Abby vs. Pillman & Eaton, Abby kept attacking Sting, so Pillman had to make the save, creating some entertaining moments. Sting won the two-ring battle royal eliminating Luger, which set Sting up as the number-one contender for the title match at the February pay-per-view. The event earned a 4.3 META reader score.

JANUARY 1992

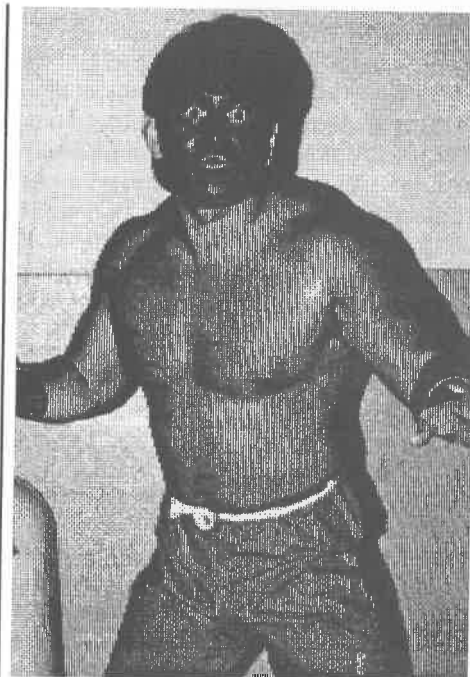
Jim Herd resigned under pressure from upper-management and was replaced by Kip Frey. Frey, a relatively young TBS attorney in his 30s, began by placing David Crockett in charge of TV production and Jim Crockett in charge of day-to-day operations. Crockett was responsible for the mild upswing in enthusiasm during the last two months of the year as he brought in Steamboat and Rude and got Dangerously to return with a big push.

Frey's appointment continued the upward trend for morale. Frey, debuting at a hot Clash on Jan. 21 in Topeka, introduced Jesse Ventura, newly signed with WCW. Herd deserves credit for initiating the negotiations with WCW, but Frey deserves credit for signing him (or blame for overpaying him, as many would argue today).

The Clash drew a 3.7 rating and a 5.5 share, tying for the lowest rating ever. The show opened with the Steiners beating Vader & Hughes. Pillman, in an interview, bashed Japan and blamed Japan for his friends losing their jobs. Pillman then punched Johnny B. Badd, who was mugging for the camera during interview time. Cactus Jack pinned Van Hammer in an amazingly hot brawl where action spilled out of the arena to a horse stall. In a refreshing ad-lib, Abby threw Missy Hyatt into a water trough. The Freebirds introduced their new song, embarrassingly poorly lip-synching to it. Kevin Nash debuted under a new gimmick dumping the Oz outfit and became Vinnie Vegas, possibly an entertaining gimmick. The final two matches were strong, with Rhodes & Simmons & Windham over Anderson & Eaton & Zbyszko in a four-star match lasting unfortunately only nine minutes. The main event saw Sting & Steamboat beat Rude & Austin in 11:21 with Ventura debuting on color commentary during this match. The Clash received an 6.5 META reader score.

Lex Luger told WCW he was quitting after the SuperBrawl pay-per-view. Luger also took off the last two-months of his stay in WCW because he had fulfilled his required 300 dates in his contract-year. Luger's final match was set for Feb. 29 against Sting at SuperBrawl.

WCW ran their second show in conjunction with New Japan on Jan. 4. A sell-out of over 60,000 saw Dusty Rhodes



GREAT MUTA (Photo by Gary Waugh)

return to the ring, teaming with his son defeating Masa Saito & Kim Duk. Sting teamed with Great Muta against The Steiners ending when Sting pinned Scott. Luger pinned Masa Chono to retain the title in a lackluster match. A highlight package of the event ran during March for around ten dollars.

FEBRUARY 1992

SuperBrawl II in Milwaukee saw Sting pin Luger to become WCW Champion. The event did a 1.0 buyrate and garnered a 7.3 META reader score. The opening match was the highlight, with Pillman pinning Liger in a 17 minute, match-of-the-year candidate. Windham & Rhodes beat Austin & Zbyszko in a great tag team match, and Rude pinned Steamboat due to Dangerously's interference.

In other WCW news, Kip Frey announced a new WCW steroid policy, a breath of fresh air after Herd previously blew-off the subject. Frey slashed ticket prices to \$10 and \$5-7 in an attempt to improve house show attendance.

MARCH 1992

A slow month for WCW saw Jim Crockett sent on long-term temporary leave after Frey and Crockett had personal disagreements. Television continued without any solid storylines. WCW

promoted their final event at the Meadowlands on Mar. 31, after which the WWF regained the rights to promote there exclusively due to WCW's poor attendance. Gordy & Williams debuted at television tapings. At a post-SuperBrawl press conference, Koloff returned and saved Sting. J.T. Southern, with much less talent than experience, debuted to feud with Van Hammer. The hiring of Southern was panned by the media and fans at arenas.

APRIL 1992

The all-new "WCW Saturday Night" debuted on Apr. 4. The show was taped with a different celebrity guest host each week from Centre Stage in Atlanta with Jim Ross hosting each week. Each week's program ended with a two-out-of-three falls match. The new format caused a ratings dip of about one-third. As late as Mar. 22, the Saturday show drew a 2.8. During April, it only broke a 2.2 once. The change was promoted by Frey, but the blame for its failure should be absorbed by all, including Rhodes.

Sting was legitimately injured in a match against Big Van Vader Apr. 12 in Atlanta, suffering two broken ribs. Sting, who returned in May for the pay-per-view, was replaced at house shows by Nikita Koloff.

MAY 1992

WCW promoted SuperBrawl II on May 17, the first of four major events within six weeks. SuperBrawl earned a 0.6 buyrate and received a 7.3 META reader score. The show, headlined by WarGames which ended when Zbyszko submitted to a Sting armbar when Eaton accidentally hit Zbyszko with a metal bar, also saw Rick & Scott Steiner beat Tatsumi Fujinami & Takayuki Iizuka. The Steiners did not sell for the Japanese team and brutalized Iizuka. Also, Pillman beat Zenk in a solid, slow-building match, but with Super Invader vs. Todd Champion, Josh vs. Morton, and Badd vs. Smothers, the show was weak at the beginning.

Of course, the biggest event of the month ultimately took most of Rhodes's power away. Bill Watts replaced Kip Frey as head of WCW. Watts, the first WCW V.P. with extensive background in wrestling, usurped much of Rhodes's power.

In other news, Frey filed lawsuit against Luger for violating the spirit of their contract release when Luger appeared on WWF television representing the WBF while promoting WWF events. Rude and Dangerously signed lucrative two-year deals.

JUNE 1992

WCW running four major shows so close together definitely revealed there was such a thing as oversaturation of the market. WrestleWar earned an 0.6 buyrate, then June 20's Beach Blast did a 0.4 buyrate, the lowest in WCW history. The free Clash which followed did worse than anyone expected, getting a paltry 2.8 ratings and a 4.8 share. The Clash, which featured the first-round of the NWA Tag Team Tournament, was the lowest rated of all-time. There were at least 14 WCW Saturday night shows which drew a 2.8 or better during 1991 and '92. The Bash,

traditionally WCW's biggest show of the year, earned a 0.4 buyrate, a mere 70,000 homes.

Beach Blast did draw a 7.3 META reader score and was entertaining, headlined with Sting defeating Cactus, Steamboat defeating Rude, and a draw between the Steiners and Williams & Gordy. The Clash, taped on June 16 but not airing until June 22, earned a 7.8 META reader score headlined again with the Steiners vs. Williams & Gordy ending when Williams pinned Scott.

The booking chores for Rhodes have now been relegated to executing that which Watts tells him to do. Rhodes is still technically the booker, but Watts has veto power and more influence on the direction of angles and the promotion than Herd and Frey, along with control over talent acquisitions and finishes to matches. Watts's influence was shown when he released a new set of rules, dubbed "The Ten Commandments."

CONCLUSION

Taking everything into consideration, one cannot honestly pan Dusty Rhodes's performance as booker during his second reign. The company had been on a downward spiral since before he left the first time. A succession of bookers did nothing to alleviate the problem and the company continued to slip. Rhodes stabilized things for the most part. At the same time, you cannot say the company is successful by any means. Rhodes may have stopped the negative momentum, but he certainly has done little to roll back the negative surge which has battered the company. In fact, much of what Rhodes has done has been merely recycling what he did in previous tenures as booker. The Mr. Hughes and Yellow Dog angles were repeats of previous angles done by Rhodes. Rhodes resorted to turn-mania in the latter part of 1991, something he also did in previous tenures as booker. There has been little in the way of newness.

Despite the numerous negatives, it would be unfair to give Rhodes any grade lower than a C for overall performance. While the product did hit a valley at the Bash '91 pay-per-view, there has been entertaining wrestling put out by WCW. The hardcore fans obviously think so: Out of 14 major shows since Rhodes took over, only one has received less than a 50-percent approval rating in the *Observer* poll, that being Clash

XV. So, the fans have obviously been finding something they like. Television ratings held up for Rhodes until Frey ordered the format change. House show attendance has been horrible, but at least it has not sunk any further and has seen ever-so-slight increases in some cities. There has been much negative press about Rhodes throughout the wrestling media. Seemingly everyone who knows how to write a letter to a publication or call a radio show expresses their suggestions and criticisms of Rhodes's moves. What's the old saying? Everyone's a critic. But to give Rhodes anything less than a C would be wrong when such high marks have been given to his shows.

Now, as Rhodes finishes his second year as booker, he is under the reigns of a different master, Bill Watts. There was widespread speculation that Rhodes would be let go right away. That obviously did not happen and there is no indication that Rhodes will be let go any time soon. So, let us hope that Watts can put the shackles on Rhodes and possibly harness any creative energy that the Dream has left inside of his clever head. It is only a matter of months when January 1993 rolls around which happens to be the end of Rhodes's guaranteed two-year contract. The question becomes obvious for Watts: Does he know of a potential booker capable of better than "C" work?

Rhodes's job depends on Watts's answer being "No."

THE IMPORTANCE OF SHOOTING

Funk, Thesz, Malenko, and Hart Discuss "Real Wrestling"

By Mark Madden, Torch Columnist

In this column I will discuss and debate the relevance of shooting ability to success in professional wrestling.

But, if you wanna go right to the ending, here it is: there is none.

That's right, there is absolutely no relationship between shooting skills and making it in the grunt 'n' groan biz, unless you consider Japan's strong-style promotions. I point this out quickly and decisively just in case you are one of those "smart fans" who show just how non-smart you really are by oohing and ahhhhing when the Steiners pound some jobber's head into the mat, who debates the oft-asked question, "Gee, if it was real, who d'ya think would be champ?" They usually answer that question with, of course, "Dr. Death" Steve Williams, uttering his name in almost reverential tone.

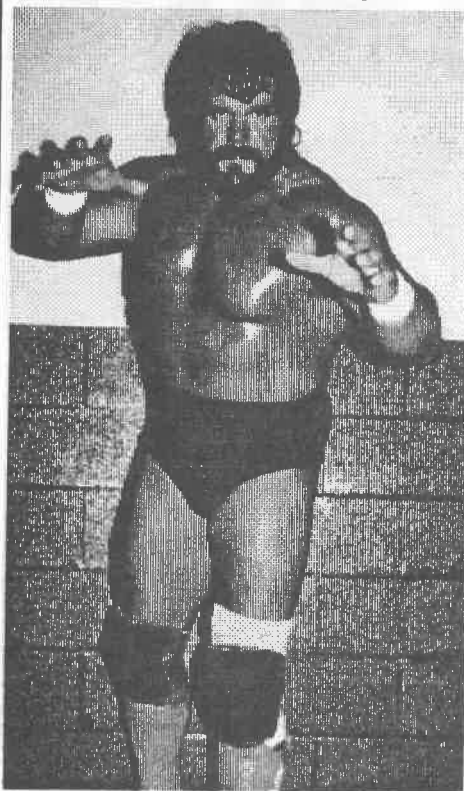
First off, beathing up a jobber is no great feat—they're paid to be beat up. Roughing them up as much as possible is no display of anything except maybe one's skill at being a bully.

As for who would be champ if it was real, it wouldn't matter. If it was done amateur-style or Japan strong-style, no one would show up to watch and the promotion would be dead in a month. If it was done pro-style as a shoot, everyone working for the promotion would be dead in a month.

So, if you are like the so-called smart fan described above, do yourself a favor and stop here. Go read a newsstand magazine, or maybe the last *Matwatch* annual.

"Who can shoot and who can't doesn't matter in pro wrestling," says former NWA World Champion Terry Funk, 48. "That's absolutely absurd. I've never been involved

in a shoot in the ring. I bet there haven't been two or three shoots in the last ten years. There's testing, sure. Guys don't sell or guys maybe whack their opponent a little extra. But that's not shooting."



STEVE "DR. DEATH" WILLIAMS (Photo by Wade Keller)

It wasn't always that way, though. Funk recalled how his father, Dory Sr., broke into the pro ranks:

"My dad was a real good amateur who wanted to be a pro, so he went to the gym, and they put a guy in with him, and my dad beat him. They kept doing it, and my old man kept beating them. Only then did they smarten him up. My old man really

thought it was a shoot until then. He was maybe 25."

Funk has never been one to let the truth get in the way of an entertaining story, but he swears the preceding anecdote wasn't romanticized.

Of course, Funk points out that the business is no longer romanticized. There's no longer a need for it to look like a shoot, so the value of shooting skills is even less now than it was in Funk's heyday—"and it didn't matter very much then," he points out.

"There used to be some guys that could shoot," he adds. "Guys like my dad, Verne Gagne, Bob Geigel... Karl Gotch was a tough shooter, and Lou Thesz was damn good. Not too many of the guys today could compete as shooters... well, Doc could for sure."

Funk thinks that today, though, the word, "shooters" and the word "coward" seem interchangeable.

"Like Maeda's kick," said Funk, referring to Akira Maeda's shoot-kick on Riki Choshu in 1989 that led to Maeda being fired from New Japan and, subsequently, to the rebirth of the UWF and strong-style wrestling in Japan. "That was so chickenshit, so cowardly... He just kicked him all out in the face in a match that wasn't a shoot. (Choshu) wasn't prepared for it. How he became a hero to some because of that is beyond me."

Funk doesn't think much of main eventers that beat up jobbers, either: "When somebody takes some skinny kid and throws him 20 feet in the air... some call that a shoot. I call it cruelty."

That being the case, it may be time to look for more cruelty in WCW now that Bill Watts is in charge. Several consulted for this story recalled how, in the old Mid-South territory, Watts would put guys who wanted tryouts in with someone like Doc or the Briscos. Then, when the guys were all blown up, Watts would go in the ring and get his jollies stretching them all over the place.

Before we go on, let's define the term "shoot." A shoot is a match that is competitive from start to finish.

That doesn't happen in pro wrestling, in this or any country.

Tempers occasionally fray and wrestlers use shoot moves in the ring. But, as Funk says, that happens very rarely.

There is some value in being a good shooter—if a wrestler incorporates a bit of that into his work, it can make his work

look tighter and more realistic. But, in my opinion, it is just as tough to become a good, realistic-looking worker as it is a good shooter.

I don't think Lou Thesz would agree, however.

Thesz, six-time former NWA World Champion, is training wrestlers, often with an eye towards placing them with UWF-International, one of the strong-style Japanese promotions. Thesz, 76, sells UWF as a shoot. It's not, but it's sort of cool that Lou speaks of it as such.

Thesz, anyway, thinks the ability to shoot is a bit more important than I do. Make that a lot more important.

"It gives you respect, it gives you credibility," said Thesz, who was World Champion in an era when shooting did, indeed, do both of those things. "All the wrestling people knew who could do what, just like all the baseball players know who can hit .100 and who can hit .500."

Thesz defines a shoot as simply, "a real match. In the past, when things would get dull, we'd have a real match, a wrestling match. We didn't call it shooting, though, just wrestling. Strangler Lewis would say, 'We will just wrestle' and we all know what he meant."

Don't know about Thesz's claims that wrestlers in his day would shoot for sport; I do know that the last time anyone thought wrestlers in the U.S. were shooting for money was in Don Owen's Portland promotion, where Owen would offer wrestlers extra money to shoot in the '60s and '70s.

Some of the guys there were, potentially, pretty good shooters, like Buzz Sawyer and Iron Sheik. Thing was, they'd just go into the ring, do a really tight work, fool Owen, and split the extra money.

Thesz thinks only three people in the U.S. know anything about shooting: Billy Robinson, Karl Gotch, and himself.

"A guy like Billy Robinson was a worker, a wrestler, a shooter, and a hooker," said Thesz, using the latter term to refer to someone who can shoot well enough to hurt and cripple someone. "Gotch was very proficient at it."

And so was Thesz. He had to be.

In Thesz's days, the NWA Title was easily the most valuable in wrestling, just like the, er, well, just like some title is today, I'm sure. Anyway, it wasn't necessary for the NWA Champion to be a proficient shooter just in case someone tried to

double-cross him and take his belt.

But it sure helped.

"I was in a lot of wars," said Thesz. "You had to watch where you went, what you did... it was part of the business. Whatever you had to do, you did. I just kept my dukes up all the time. I wasn't in those situations often, maybe once or twice a year. But I always, always watched my step."

Thesz is bored by those who talk about shooting: "Those people are the arena rats,



LOU THESZ, 1991 (Photo by Wade Keller)

the hangers-on. They talk that way to seem hip." He's also bored by the debate over which of today's wrestlers are toughest.

"It's not relevant, not at all," he said. "But there are guys today that are good wrestlers, like the Steiners, Williams, and Rotunda. Give me 90 days with any of them and they'd be different people. They'd be hookers. Aerobically, they'd be able to outlast anyone, and they'd be able to cripple somebody if it came to that."

Thesz is currently training UWF International World Champion Gary Albright.

"I'm teaching him a few hooks he doesn't know," Thesz said. "This isn't that easy. It's like getting into sex. It can be years before you're proficient at it, and some people just have more aptitude at it."

Thesz thinks strong-style wrestling could draw in the U.S. given a re-education period.

"Hey, the people here have learned to accept choreographed tumbling," he said. "They re-educated the people in Japan. The

fans there are aware of concession holds now, and they get excited when someone gets caught in one."

Thesz speculated that UWF might promote a card in the U.S. at some point: "It's a possibility. They'd have to tread carefully. There are a lot of pitfalls, like too much wrestling on TV. But they might pursue it."

Would strong-style wrestling work in this country? I'd like to see someone give it a whirl, but I sure would not invest my money in it. Strong-style wrestling relies too much on the actual event and on the participants' natural charisma to draw people; things like angles and manufactured personalities and gimmicks just don't fit in. In other words, you couldn't mix strong-style wrestling with U.S. style promotion.

Since fans in this country haven't seen a strong-style event and since natural charisma among wrestlers is in short supply—watch any WWF or WCW show to confirm that fact—I just don't think such a promotion would work.

But I'd go, especially if Bob Backlund was on the card and I was close enough to hear his cheekbones crack, and see his eyes blacken. But I digress.

Thesz will soon appear on the syndicated "George Michaels's Sports Machine" to "talk about real wrestling." And Thesz says the UWF is real wrestling.

"It's a legitimate contest," said Thesz. "The other stuff in this country is a joke, a comedy, a fiasco, an overexposed fantasy. Even people who don't have enough sense to come in out of the rain don't watch it anymore."

Lou Thesz is a legend, an enjoyable conversationalist, and a man I respect. But this is about shooting, so I regrettably have to shoot on Thesz when he defends Maeda's kick on Choshu, saying, when you're in the ring, you have to be ready all the time. You can't have stars in your eyes out there."

I hope that comment was an extension of his kayfabe tactics for UWF, because otherwise it's pathetic. There's no justification for a wrestler, in a worked match, to kick someone all out, especially when both of his opponent's hands are tied up, which Choshu's were. That's nothing less than cowardly.

But that statement was the only thing I didn't like about talking to Lou Thesz. He relates a story about speaking to the crowd

before a UWFI card in which his enthusiasm for the revival of "real wrestling" in Japan is evident.

"I just said, 'What you are about to witness is real wrestling,'" he said. "They gave me a big hand, like I invented it."

He didn't. But he has helped perpetuate it. And for that, Lou Thesz deserves a big hand.

So does Larry Malenko, 59. Known in his wrestling days as the evil Dr. Boris Malenko, he now trains wrestlers in Florida.

Some of his trainees are taught to work strong-style by the one and only Karl Gotch, the "God of Wrestling" according to the Japanese, who has an affiliation with Pro Wrestling Fujiwara-Gumi, a Japanese strong-style promotion headed by semi-legendary shooter Yoshiaki Fujiwara.



AKIRA MAEDA

Besides UWFI and PWF-Gumi, the other strong-style promotion in Japan is RINGS, which features Maeda. All three are, to some extent, off-shoots of the UWF, which splintered in 1991 after an incredibly successful year-long run.

"That kind of wrestling has nothing to do with the wrestling in the U.S.," Malenko said. "This kind of wrestling is more within the realm of reality. Now, I'm not going to knock success, but it's hard for me to understand how people can watch that stuff. Things used to be much more

believable, things used to look better.

"But how pro wrestling and shooting can be in the same conversation is beyond me. One's for entertainment, the other—well, it's for entertainment, too, but a different kind of entertainment."

When asked if PWF-Gumi is a shoot or work, Malenko chuckled and said, "It's hard to figure out. Sometimes I think they do shoot-wrestle to a finish. Like I said, it's hard to figure out."

But Malenko spoke in no uncertain terms when it came to the question of who the toughest man in U.S. pro wrestling was.

"Who cares?" he said. "It doesn't matter at all. Stuff like beating up a jobber... that's being a bully. It's easy to be tough if you know the guy's going to let you be tough."

As for shooting within the realm of U.S. pro wrestling, Malenko said, "I've been around wrestling for 41 years and I've heard a lot of talk about shooting, but I haven't seen too many."

Like a lot of us, he likes Steve Williams and Terry Gordy.

"I think a great deal of them," Malenko said. "There's a lot of realism to their work. When they wrestled the Steiners, it was a different kind of match. I enjoyed watching it. It reminded me of the days when I was wrestling. That kind of wrestling can draw. I think Bill Watts knows that and, for that reason, I think he is the guy that can turn that company around."

Or maybe Karl Gotch could, just by intimidation. Gotch, 68, may still be the best shooter in this or any other country.

"I doubt anyone can take him even now," said Malenko. "He's head and shoulders above everyone else. He says there are 141 ways to make someone submit, and he knows them all. He used to go to Japan and clean out the judokans, the judo halls. He was the legit toughest ever."

As we've discussed, that's irrelevant. But what the heck, let's let Malenko tell a Gotch story:

"Riki Choshu came here to train when Karl was helping book New Japan. He missed a few workouts, so Karl found him and got him in the ring. Now Choshu had wrestled in the Olympics, but it took Karl about 30 seconds to make him scream unmercifully. And Choshu went home the next day."

Gotch could not be reached for comment, but in 1990, he did a memorable interview with Jeff Bowdren for the

Wrestling Observer Newsletter.

Some excerpts:

* "To be a good show wrestler, you should at least practice wrestling. Now all you have is routines. Before, when you went somewhere, no matter what part of the world you were from, you could wrestle with guys. Now these guys can't. They're stuck on the same old thing and their matches are always the same. It's a song and dance routine. The only thing missing is the music."

* "Wrestling is the hardest and most difficult sport in the world. You have to have it all. You've got to be strong like a (competitive) weightlifter, agile like an acrobat. You've got to have the endurance of a middle-distance runner, the quickness of a sprinter, and the mind of a chess player."

* "You should act like an athlete and look like one. You should try to make it look like it's combat even if it's just show wrestling... nowhere could you ever see a guy crawl up the turnbuckles. It's just like the Empire State Building. Just stand there and wait (to be rushed) off... It's not believable. How do they want people to believe this?"

* "These wrestlers have no believability anymore. They take these bumps that don't mean anything. Where's the wrestling? (Go) to the marquee and cut out the word 'wrestling.' Say 'we've got a show here tonight, but we don't know what we call it.' That would be fine with me."

* "I had a few shoots here and a few in Japan... some guys, you treat them nice and they think, 'Hey, that Kraut can't be too tough.' And then they wake up. I tell them, you looked for it yourself. There's a big world of difference. I've had some amateur wrestlers that tried. But I was an amateur before I turned pro."

Gotch insulted a lot of people in much of the rest of the interview, calling them "jumping daffodils" and so forth, which is okay. He's tough enough that he can say what he wants. One person reached for this story called Gotch "sort of annoying, mainly because he knows he can be."

Amen. But Gotch's general sentiments are that wrestling should look more realistic. I think he thinks it should be a shoot. I don't.

But it should look like one.

Reality in U.S. pro wrestling took a big nose-dive when Bruno Sammartino enjoyed an undeniably long and successful



BILLY ROBINSON (Photo by Mike Lano)

run as WWWF Champion in the Northeast. Sammartino was a great draw, but he wasn't a believable wrestler. Then along came Superstar Graham, who drew with his build, not his work. And they were both preceded by Gorgeous George, who drew with his gimmick, not his work.

So, today's wrestlers—maladjusted kids then, no doubt—didn't see a need to learn how to work. They saw a need to get over. But they ignored the total picture. Looks and personality can bring 'em into the building, but it can't keep 'em there. That's in evidence more than ever now.

It has to look real. Until it does, pro wrestling in the U.S. will never again draw like it should. I'm often full of crap, but trust me on this one.

And yeah, I know Karl Gotch never drew in the U.S. That's because he ignored the big picture, too. He had no personality.

Speaking of personality, every pro wrestling fan should get to speak with Calgary's Stu Hart, father of current wrestlers Bret and Owen Hart.

Hart, 77, said being a good shooter has always been a mixed bag in pro wrestling, illustrating his point with a story:

"Billy Robinson went after Sailor White in the dressing room for some reason. Billy was known as a shooter and Sailor White was obviously a bit scared of him. So Billy was slapping him, three or four times, when Sailor just wound up and threw a lucky punch that hit Billy on the button.

"Billy went down, and Sailor White, you could see, was afraid if Billy got up, he'd kill him, Billy being a tough shooter and all. So he kicked him in the nuts a bunch of times.

"So, being a good shooter is no guarantee. Sure, it can get you respect. But all it got Billy Robinson was intensive care."

That time. Another time, in Florida, Robinson was attacked by angry referee Stu Schwartz, but only after Robinson has his own trunks down around his ankles in the locker room. After Schwartz's first assault proved ineffective, Robinson pulled up his trunks and knocked the snot out of him.

And, another time, Robinson was very effective in straightening out someone who tried to screw with him. Trouble was, it was Greg Gagne, the son of AWA promoter Verne. No wins in the big matches for you, Billy.

But back to Stu Hart.

"To be honest, being a good shooter is a pain in the ass," he continued.

"A shooter has respect among wrestlers, but you get yourself in more trouble than you can handle sooner or later. And in the ring, other wrestlers won't trust you. The cooperation level goes down, you both look bad, and you both get booed out of the building."

Hart gave Buddy Rogers credit for being a great worker and a great showman, then made the point this article has been trying to make all along:

"There should be a certain amount of submission wrestling involved. I've wrestled close, had matches with good, tight work. When I finished, I got back to the locker room, and the other wrestlers thought I was going all out. I mean, it was so believable you couldn't challenge it. That's the kind of wrestling I liked to wrestle, and the kind I like to watch. That's what puts the money in the box office.

"Being a good shooter can help you wrestle like that. But it isn't really necessary."

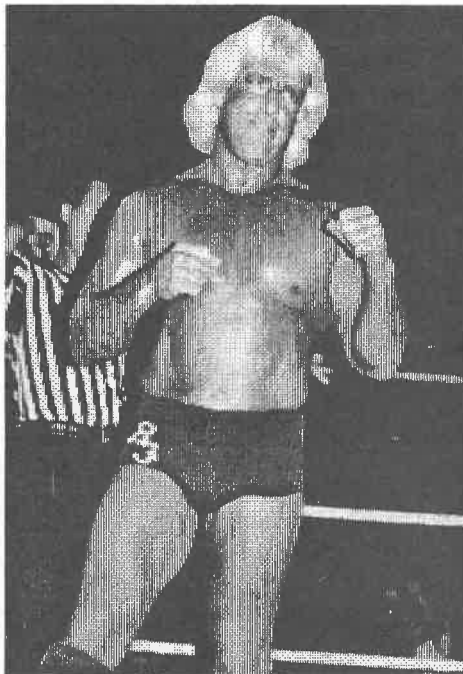
It is necessary to close this article with a couple good Stu Hart stories, though. One he didn't tell me, but it's hardly a secret.

Hart used to have football players ask to come and work out with him, a move they regretted. Hart used to tape himself making the footballers cry out in pain, then play them back later for the amusement of him and his friends.

He also shed some light on the time Karl Gotch didn't win.

"There was a guy named Eric the Red, who wasn't a very good worker, who worked primarily in the prelims in the '60s," recalled Hart. "Eric was mad about being at the bottom of the card, so he tried to impress the promoter. I believe it was in Portland that he was a shooter. He made the remark that no one in the territory could best him in 10 minutes.

"Well, Gotch was there at that time. So Karl went out and started by headbutting him in the nose. He just kicked the hell out of him. But he couldn't put the kid away.



ERIC FLAIR, ANY LESS GREAT BECAUSE HE IS NOT A "SHOOTER?" (Photo by Wade Keller)

He lasted the ten minutes.

"Well, that news spread like wildfire. It really tarnished Karl's reputation quite a bit."

I'm known as quite a shooter myself, but I have no desire to see my reputation tarnished. That's why I didn't take Stu Hart up on the generous offer made by anyone involved with this column.

"If you could get up here in person, we could run through this a little. It's hard to describe. You'd understand better if I could show you," he said.

Thanks, but no thanks, Stu. I have no desire to be on one of your home videos.

Mark Madden of Pittsburgh, Pa. is a monthly columnist for Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly. Madden is also a 14-year veteran sports writer with the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

HONKEYTONK MAN TELLS ALL

A Candid, Detailed, First-Hand Look Inside the Modern WWF

By Wade Keller, Editor/Publisher

Honkeytonk Man spent several successful years as a top heel in the WWF, including a long run as the Intercontinental Champion. Since leaving the WWF in 1991, he has worked independent events in the East regularly. But the person behind the Honkeytonk Man wrestling character is Wayne Ferris, who in the following special extensive "Torch Talk" interview, shares many observations, recollections, and experiences from his years with the WWF. This interview, conducted Aug. 10, 1992, is one of the most detailed, inside looks at what it is like to be a wrestler in the WWF ever published. Ferris begins talking about how he originally got into wrestling and moves all the way through his career to his thoughts on his future in this business.

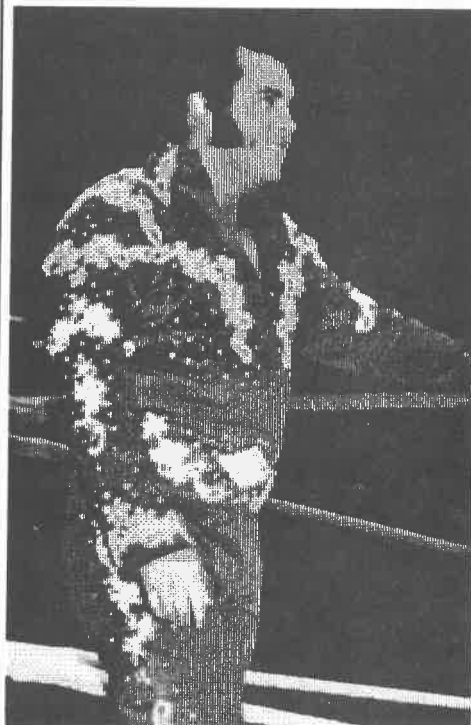
Keller: How did you originally get involved in pro wrestling? I assume it had something to do with Jerry Lawler, your cousin.

Ferris: No, it really didn't have anything to do with Jerry Lawler at all. I like to say it was an extension of childhood. That's kind of a tongue in cheek joke—never wanting to grow up or never wanting to get a real job. But seriously, when Lawler started in the business, I had two other cousins who were in the wrestling business, also. I was the only athlete in the family because Lawler himself never participated in any organized sports in school. And the other two cousins didn't either. I said, this is supposed to be professional sports or professional athletics, here I am, a trained coach and a high school football coach, I went through all the amateur sports—baseball, basketball, football—and they're the ones in a professional sport. Something doesn't make sense. So I adapted very quickly to professional wrestling. I was able to pick it

up quite readily.

Keller: Had you actually been coaching high school sports?

Ferris: I was actually a high school coach at the time I started training for wrestling.



HONKEYTONK MAN (Photo by Wade Keller)

Keller: Who did you train with and what year was that?

Ferris: Herb Welch trained me in 1976 and my training partner at the time was Koko B. Ware.

Keller: Who were the other cousins?

Ferris: Carl Fergie. I haven't heard

from him in a couple years. I tried to get him a job with Titan doing the refereeing and ring truck thing because that's what he was doing with Watts when Watts closed-down. I saw in Meltzer's *Observer* how he had worked in Louisiana for Buck Robley before they closed.

Keller: He wrestled as "King" Carl Fergie, too, right?

Ferris: Yeah, and he had a brother, Gary, who was wrestling but never really did anything, he just wrestled locally.

Keller: Did you first think of becoming a wrestler because you were a wrestling fan or because Lawler was in the business?

Ferris: No, I've been a fan myself all my life. Very, very early in life I can remember seeing Lou Thesz and seeing Buddy Fuller and Herb Welch and Sputnik Monroe, people who were big drawing cards in the South in the late-'50s. It actually had nothing to do with Lawler being in the wrestling business at all. I would have been in some form of entertainment no matter what. When I was in Junior High School in the 7th and 8th grade, the teachers would go around and ask people what they'd like to do or if they'd do certain things. I stood up and sang a song and that was in 8th grade. Now that was long before Lawler even thought about wrestling. So, you see, when it comes to entertainment, I've always been more into that than anything else.

Keller: When was your first connection with Elvis?

Ferris: If I remember right it was 1982. I was in the Pensacola-Mobile-Birmingham circuit. It actually took off from the Schnyder character (on the TV show "One Day at a Time"). He had the pencil-thin mustache, side-burns, sleeves rolled up, with cigarettes rolled up the sleeve, black hair, a real greasy look. So originally the character looked like that. So some fans in Birmingham, Alabama said with the side-burns and the black hair I'd look good in a jump suit. Within two weeks, they took my measurements and had a jump-suit made for me and that started the whole thing. The Honkeytonk Man came during the same period of time. The Schnyder-character I called Honkeytonk Man. I took it off of a song by a guy who was killed many, many years ago—Johnny Horton—he had done "North

to Alaska", "Battle of New Orleans," and one of his songs was "Honkeytonk Man". Then I took off with the Elvis jumpsuit character for quite some time. Then I was in Calgary, Canada doing it. It so happened that me and David Shults were partners in Calgary and we were partners in Pensacola. Then he had all these video tapes of what he and I had done. When he went to Minneapolis, he and Hogan got back together after many, many years because we were all together in Pensacola 12 or 13 years ago when Hogan first started. So he showed him that and they sat around and they used a lot of the stuff we did in Calgary and he and Hogan did it in Minneapolis. Then Vince (McMahon) came and got Hogan, and when Hogan left, he took Shults with him. So then they came to Calgary and that's how I saw Hogan again for the first time in 2 years and they hired me. And then Vince just expanded the character and took it nationwide.

Keller: Had you ever been an Elvis fan?

Ferris: I was born in '53 so I was a young kid, 7 or 8, when Elvis hit the big time and I remember seeing the first Elvis on the "Ed Sullivan Show" which was a big thing in our era. Being from around here, close to Memphis, you really can't not associate yourself with that person. But I never went to any live concert or anything like that. I wasn't that kind of person. I was never a record collector of anybody, either. I never owned a record player in my life. Once they got a tape player, that was the extent of things.

Keller: And you never played the guitar?

Ferris: Naw.

Keller: You could have fooled us, though.

Ferris: I always wanted to and probably should have and would have liked to but I just never did. Naw, that's all a spoof being able to play the guitar.

Keller: When you entered the WWF it was kind of a strange situation in that the promoters were unable to tailor your character how they wanted to. The fans didn't like you. Explain how that situation worked itself out.

Ferris: When I had my first interview with Vince, I went down to Stamford from Calgary for a job interview. He goes over a little battle plan with you, about the WWF and all those things before he hires you. Just a little one-on-one. I brought a tape

and I put together a ten-minute demo. He saw the tape and Vince liked the character, he really did. He himself tried to be a '50s rock 'n' roller at some point in time where he wanted to do the singing. Periodically you'll see him with his hair pulled back in a certain way. He used to dress in those pink and yellow and orange flashy suits and stuff like that.

Anyway, he said he wanted to do this thing as a babyface, a good-guy, and he could see me teaming up with Hogan and us doing all these things. He was actually looking at the merchandising end of it. He knew that the Elvis character was a big merchandising thing that was just getting started back then. So he saw merchandise, but I flat out told him, "I don't think this will work. I created this character as a spoof on this person, as a real knock to the rednecks who really love this guy. It was a knock on them. I really don't think this will work. For the last three or four years, the people have hated this gimmick. They just hate it."

He said, "No, no, we can do this gimmick. You'll see, I'll show ya'." He brought me in as a good-guy and it meant absolutely nothin'. It was terrible. It was terrible from their viewpoint as a business because I was killing all of the heat the heels had on themselves when they'd work with me.

Keller: Did you ever get a positive reaction out of even one crowd?

Ferris: No, never. Now, I do a little bit. If I'm wrestling Bob Orton. He's the only guy I've wrestled so far—and that's been on the East Coast—if I wrestle him and he goes out there and does his thing to make the fans mad. Even now in some places, if I go out first, I'm hated. But if I'm wrestling him on one of Kowalski's shows and if I jump on him, they like him. If he jumps me, they like me. I was only one of the heels in the WWF that carried serious heat. Others, people would walk up to them and ask for autographs. People actually cursed me and wanted me to get beat.

Keller: Were there any out-of-ring incidents where you were at the hotel and being harassed?

Ferris: People hated me. They would go up to the other heels and ask for autographs and then look at me and say, "I don't want yours! I don't like you."

Keller: Did anyone ever interrupt your meals or spit on you?

Ferris: They would make their cutting remarks, they'd curse at me. There would be a whole table full of heels getting a bigger push than I was at the time and people would be over there getting autographs from them, but they hated me too much to want an autograph.

Keller: Did people criticize you for insulting the image and name of Elvis?

Ferris: Yeah. That was nationwide. That was all over. Every place I ever went. This Elvis thing is a phenomena. This guy had a tremendous impact on a generation. He was like a Mohammed Ali, there's very few people who come along in our lifetime and have a tremendous impact on a generation. And he definitely had an impact on people and they don't like to see impersonators of that man.

Keller: What tricks of the trade, so to speak, did you learn while using the Honkeytonk Man gimmick to gain the maximum possible heat from the fans?

Ferris: Well, that silly little dance. A good leg shake or hip swivel or acting like you can play the guitar when it's obvious the music coming out of it is atrocious. And in general the interviews themselves. As long as Vince would give me interview time on TV, I could draw people to the arenas to watch me wrestle. My time went down to 15 and 30 second interviews and I carried no heat then.

Keller: What was a day in your life as a WWF wrestler like?

Ferris: Everybody was on the same routine. When I first came to the WWF, we didn't have the early morning flights. It was a little more relaxing. We wouldn't leave sometimes until 8, 9, 10, or even 11 in the morning. When Vince changed the arrangements and the way he did his travel, then we were on our way out on the first flight every morning no matter if it was 6:00, 5:45, 6:15.

For some reason I always had to work the last match. I was always the last match on the card for some reason. You'd like to say it was a personality conflict between me and one of the agents like (Jay) Strongbow, who I knew didn't like me and I knew he'd make me go last every night. But when I was in some other agent's town, me and Jimmy Hart, we'd always go on last.

Keller: *Why is that necessarily bad? I think the average wrestling fan would think that it is traditionally prestigious to be on last, in the main event.*

Ferris: Well, it gets to the point where if you're not the main event, you're not being pushed as the star attraction and you are, say, the semi-main or middle of the card, so-to-speak, and you're on last every night and somebody who was a semi-main event might go right after intermission. They're back at the hotel, they've gotten their food and their meal. Sometimes I'd fly my family in to see me. We wouldn't get out of the building until 11. You get back to the hotel if you had an hour's drive—some were two hours away—you get back at one or two in the morning and you have to get up at six or five o'clock to catch your flight.

Keller: *What was it about Strongbow that made him supposedly not like you?*

Ferris: Oh, he was just jealous of all guys in the business. He's one of these older wrestlers who doesn't know when to go home, when to say, "The wrestling business has been good to me, it's time for me to step down." He's one of these guys who will end up dying on the road, literally. He just will not give it up. He's really jealous that guys make a lot of money. Now I can't help it that nobody in his day, that the promoters then didn't pay well. By the same token, bread was a nickel and gasoline was a quarter a gallon.

Keller: *Not only that, but more wrestlers could find full-time work.*

Ferris: That's exactly right. Back when I started there were 30 territories a guy could work in.

Keller: *In your opinion, were there some managers who didn't have a jealous streak in them?*

Ferris: Yeah, Jack Lanza seemed to be one of the better, up-front, straight-forward kind of guys.

Keller: *Did the grind on the road get to you or were you able to handle it well?*

Ferris: I did okay on it. My whole deal with my wife in the very beginning, Wade, was simple. I met her when I was already eight years in the wrestling business. Once I met her and we decided to get married, we decided I'd stay in the business until our children got to school. Well, when I go to this New York thing, let's try it for a couple

of years. If it works, it works. If it doesn't, then it doesn't. We wouldn't lose anything. Plus he was a small kid. So we decided to wait until he was in school. So he got to kindergarden and I said, "That don't count." So I stayed one more year. When he was in first grade, it was time for me to be home. He's going into first grade now. I got off the road a year ago. I left the WWF in December of 1990.

Keller: *Do you think you handled the road better or worse than other guys?*

Ferris: Better, for the simple reason, Wade, that I didn't have a lot of the vices a lot of these guys did. I'm not gonna' say that I didn't do my share of steroids and everything else that people do in this business, because I did and the rest of them should go ahead and admit it. Why try to say, "I'm clean, I'm clean." Why go out there and insult somebody's intelligence? But I didn't have the vices as far as staying out in the bars at night, staying in trouble with the office of the WWF or getting myself in trouble with the law. So I didn't have that problem. Jimmy Hart and I, we travelled together all the time and for the first four years we stayed together. We were together everyday. While we were on the road, we shared expenses every day. And I saved my money. After ten years in this business—and I've worked with Nick Gulas and Jerry Jarrett and Eddie Graham and Stu Hart—I literally starved to death. I didn't make any money. I just made expenses. I made enough to live on and continued to hope this wrestling thing would be a long-term investment that would finally pay off and it did. After ten years it started to pay off, I had four-and-a-half years of a tremendous, super-good run in New York. I saved as much as I could. I did not waste money. So consequently, when you ask how I handled the road? I handled the road really well. I was able to get up and make the towns every day. I never missed any towns because I was laid out all night and missed my flight. I didn't do that. I didn't waste my money that way.

Keller: *Who were some of the other guys who you thought handled the road well and had a grasp on the temporary nature of a stay in the WWF?*

Ferris: Well, it's quite obvious, Tito Santana. The Hebner boys, the referees. Well, one's a road agent now because of his

health, but they've been in the business for over twenty years themselves. Jimmy Hart handles the road really well. He's been in the music business on the road his whole life. He's a 30 year veteran of the road, period.

Keller: *Was he probably your best friend in the WWF?*

Ferris: Yeah, I'd have to say so. Greg Valentine handled the road okay. King



JIMMY HART

Haku, even though he did stay out at night and hang around at the bars and enjoy himself, he handled the road very well.

Keller: *Who were some of the top guys who did not handle the road well, those who are just killing themselves and should probably ease up a bit?*

Ferris: Well, it's hard to say because they're still there. It's stressful on them, I'm sure. I don't want to mention someone's name who I think should or shouldn't do something because it wouldn't be fair to them. They'd probably say it's sour grapes from me and I'm jealous because they're there and I'm not. But I think the work load should be cut down. It's quite simple, Wade. You can only earn so much because you have to pay so much in taxes. Then you end up, if you have a good year, the last six months or at least the last three months, you're working to pay Uncle Sam. So that's the way I look at it.

Hillbilly Jim. He's another who handles the road well and handled his finances. He knows when to take time off

because of the tax structures and things like that.

Keller: *What is Hillbilly Jim really like? Is the real person at all like his TV personality? He comes off so extreme as a nice, innocent, country guy.*

Ferris: He is a nice, innocent country guy, really. Jim is a sweet person, a really good friend of mine. He's been to my house several times when he comes to Memphis. He's a sales person for Coliseum Home Video. He's the Southeastern Regional Sales Manager, so he travels rather extensively throughout the South. He calls on video buyers to buy Coliseum Video which distributes Titan's videos. Jim's got a college education and played pro basketball. He ended-up playing semi-pro basketball. He's very smart.

Keller: *He's someone who's been around for many years and you never get a grasp on what he does most of the time or what he's like.*

Ferris: He's nothing like Uncle Elmer. Uncle Elmer was a hillbilly, he was the character he portrayed, whereas Hillbilly Jim is actually a Kentucky guy, but he's from Bowling Green, which doesn't really make him a Hillbilly. If he wanted to, and he's done several albums just himself, he could be a section player in Nashville really easily on guitar. He's that good on guitar. He's the best I've ever heard and I've heard a lot play guitar. He's not an Eric Clapton, but he is as good as anybody in Nashville who plays. He's been playing since being four years old. We got along so well because I had the guitar along with me and he'd entertain all the guys. He knows a million songs.

Keller: *He'd do that regularly in the locker room?*

Ferris: Right, except when Strongbow would tell him to stop doing that. Strongbow would go to Vince and tell him, "We should get rid of the guitar, the boys are having too much fun. The boys aren't thinking about the matches." Now that's real naive in the 1990s, that the boys aren't thinking about the matches. What are you supposed to be doing, taking notes of the matches? When you're a 15 year veteran, you don't need to be thinking about your matches.

Keller: *Especially when you're doing the same thing every night.*

Ferris: Right, it's the same match every night for six months. The only difference is one night it might go 30 seconds longer or shorter than it did the other night.

Keller: *Did it get monotonous doing that every night?*

Ferris: Yes, it got boring and monotonous. There again, you add that, wrestling the same opponent in the same match every night, the travel schedule, and you put those things together and that leads to a very confined and boring life. When they say the WWF guys are robots, it tends to be true because now you don't have to think. Your tickets are there, you're up at six, you're on the plane, you go to the hotel, you eat, you go to the gym, you go to the town, you got the same opponent, it's the same match; you don't have to think about anything.

Keller: *Is it worth what the WWF pays the guys to go through such a schedule? Was the typical schedule, ten days on, three off, three on, three off?*

Ferris: That was pretty much the schedule. Sometimes it would be 14 on, and three off, four on, and three off. And still, three off is still like two-and-a-half. And that depended on what part of the country you lived in.

Keller: *Did most of the wrestlers seem happy or unhappy?*

Ferris: They seemed like burned-out people with blank stares in their eyes, their tempers flaring up, anxieties. Frustrations. The thing is, Wade, there's no creativity. You see, on the independent circuit, like I'm on now, when promoters pay me good money, I'm able to give them a 15 or 20 minute match and I'm able to be very creative and do things I like to do and things I know how to do and things I was trained to do and things this business is about. When you've got a five minute match with Randy Savage or Tito Santana every night of the week for six months, there's no creativity there. There's none.

Keller: *Is that frustrating?*

Ferris: Yes. And there's no creativity in your interviews because it's 15 or 30 seconds. What can you say in 15 seconds? You don't get to mention the name of the town and other things. There's no creativity. When they say it's like Hollywood or it's scripted, it's very much

like that now.

Keller: *That's too bad since it does take away a lot of the spontaneity that makes wrestling so exciting.*

Ferris: It's just the way their TV is structured that there is never anything spontaneous. Nothing. Never. It is very restrictive.

Keller: *With the monotony of the schedule, was there a lot of recreational drug use from what you saw?*

Ferris: Yeah, that's pretty well common knowledge. When all of this came out about, the steroids, the drugs, sexual harassment, and things of that nature—I don't like them picking into the wrestling business, because I think if you dig into any big corporation or any business, you're going to find certain aspects of that. To pick on Hogan, or to make him a scapegoat, he's the biggest name in the world in our business, he's one of the most recognizable figures in the world, period. He's more recognizable than most movie stars. But to use him and say he was the man behind all of this, he wasn't. He didn't do any more than anybody else did. He didn't do any less than anybody else did.

Keller: *He is the one who went on Arsenio Hall who said the ridiculous story of only having used steroids a couple of times strictly to help an injury recover. Being the biggest name in this industry, he could have been a leader.*

Ferris: If I had been him, or he had asked me, I would have said exactly this: "Hogan, do what the people in Hollywood do. Don't acknowledge it. Say 'no comment.' The whole thing will die sooner or later." It would have died with no-comment. He didn't have to go on the show and he didn't have to say anything. If he was going to say something, go on there and say, "Hey, when I was using steroids, they were legal. I took a lot of them. I probably shouldn't have, I don't recommend them to anybody." If you're going to go out there and stick your neck out, you better do something to save your neck. When he went out there and said he used steroids three times in his whole life, well, you're asking for it now. He should have just said, "No comment. Go to Vince." Because Vince is the guy who created this whole thing, this WWF monster so-to-speak, so he should be the one to answer for it.

Keller: *Has the coverage of the WWF and pro wrestling in general been good in one sense in that all of this coming to the forefront has raised the awareness of wrestlers and fans to where promoters now have to be held more accountable for the way they treat wrestlers while wrestlers have to be more accountable for the way they live their lives if they're going to be role models? Is that a positive?*

Ferris: I don't think any of that would be anything positive, Wade. When Herb Welch broke me into the business, he told me, "They've been trying to kill the wrestling business ever since time began. It's just a business that can't be killed." I said, "Well, what about bad newspaper publicity?" He said, "Any publicity is good publicity."

Keller: *That might be a way to look at it, but is all of this press coverage trying to kill wrestling or is all of this press coverage simply covering pro wrestling and trying to clean it up?*

Ferris: No, they're never going to clean up how the promotion is done, how the money is paid, whether the gate is checked by a third party because they've abolished athletic commissions in most places. Where they do have commissions now, they're only concerned with collecting the tax money that's due to the state and nothing else. I saw the thing in the New York paper about attacking Randy Garden, the athletic commissioner in the state of New York. Well, if there's any awareness, it's going to be made that way, through collecting tax dollars.

In the case of Dr. Zahorian, he was a State Athletic Commission doctor. The State Athletic Commission of Pennsylvania knew he was at the building, they knew what he was doing, but to attack the wrestlers and to even attack Zahorian, I think they missed the case. It should have been dumped in the state's lap. The governor of that state was the man who appointed the commissioner and gave him all the kosher little jobs. Then these people were the ones who went out and took the money from Vince and all the promoters to turn the other way.

Keller: *So what about Pat Patterson and Terry Garvin being gone? If those stories were true about them abusing and harassing wrestlers and children, then is it not good they are not getting paid while doing that anymore?*

Ferris: Well, we in and around the

business believe that those two people are probably still around and have something, somewhere, to do with Titan Sports and the WWF. I mean, that's quite obvious. Maybe they're not still in the office physically, but all this stuff can still be done by phone or whatever the case may be. I'll know they're gone when I see them working another job somewhere.

Keller: *Not to allege anything, but theoretically you're saying they could still be doing everything they were accused of doing in person now over the phone to wrestlers and still having conferences with McMahon?*

Ferris: Right. I'm not going to venture to say it is, but it is something that is possible.

Keller: *Just to be fair to the WWF, are there any stories that have come out that you know from being part of the WWF for so many years that just are not true?*

Ferris: I was never physically present during any of the stories that have come out of the allegations and drug stuff or harassment. It was all hearsay. You know what hearsay is like. You can hear anything. But it was all a big joke. When people say Vince joked about it, or Pat and Garvin joked about it, yeah, even all the wrestlers joked about it. It was a laughing matter in the WWF. I knew sooner or later, and I told a lot of people—there again, it's hearsay—but I had even stated outloud that sooner or later this sexual part of this thing was going to get them in trouble.

Keller: *It was pretty common knowledge in the WWF and Vince had to know there was talk of sexual harassment going on in the company?*

Ferris: I don't know if it was sexual harassment or just sexual escapades or the sexual activities.

Keller: *So people joked about the homosexuals and promiscuousness?*

Ferris: Right, and they joked about the heterosexual things that go in the WWF or in the locker room, too.

Keller: *Was there ever a sign of wrestlers being disgruntled with needing to do something to keep their job, or was that something where if it was going on, it was kept quiet.*

Ferris: Oh yeah, yeah. What you just said about guys being unhappy. This had to do with me. I can say anything I want to

about myself. When I had the Intercontinental belt, I used to say, "Hey, I didn't have to back into this belt," if you know what I'm saying. Or someone would say, "You've held this belt a long time," and I'd say, "Yeah, I know what position to be in." It was like a joke.

Keller: *But the wrestlers thought that behind every joke was some substance which made the joke possible?*

Ferris: It was a tongue-in-cheek kind of thing. I know of people who would say, "I'm not in with the right people," or "I'm not doing the right things to get myself a right spot on the card."

Keller: *So the jokes were born out of a reality that everyone believed was present?*

Ferris: Right.

Keller: *What is the answer for steroid abuse in pro wrestling? Is there an answer or is it something people are going to have to accept as part of the business and police as best they can?*

Ferris: The only way to get rid of it—not just for pro wrestling, but sports in general, because I don't want to suggest it's a problem exclusive to wrestling—until they have an unbiased third party to administer the test and do all the things they have to do, they'll never stop it. As long as the NFL is giving its own test, as long as Vince is giving his own test, as long as the NBA and the NHL and all the professional sports are policing themselves, it will never stop.

Keller: *And the tests would have to be sophisticated enough not to be blocked or beaten, which is another hurdle to jump?*

Ferris: Right. It's quite simple, it's not going to stop and as long as organizations police it themselves, it will never stop. That's a joke. Seriously, do you think if Hulk Hogan was set for the main event at Wrestlemania and his test came up positive that Vince, looking at a \$20 million gate, he's going to tell Hogan to be suspended. I'm not going to name a name, but do you think if the star quarterback on a team tested positive right before the SuperBowl that they would tell him he couldn't play? Sure, right.

Keller: *The same pressure may exist with the star athletes in the Olympics.*

Ferris: Right. If it's not an unbiased

third party administering it, it has no chance of stopping.

Keller: *Is there anything entertaining that goes on behind the scenes, any traditions and anecdotes from your WWF days?*

Ferris: There's really nothing. There's really such robotism where the guys show up. Some of the guys might be on natural highs because they're excited about something that might have happened to them that day and others might be on such a low, then you've got some in the middle.

Keller: *Did you notice that due to steroid use, the ups and downs were more extreme?*

Ferris: It's always a touchy situation, period, because you never know what's going on with a guy's personal or professional life. If you go make a joke as he's sitting in the corner alone, he might react by wanting to fight ya'. A lot of guys don't like other guys having fun, sort of like Strongbow. He doesn't like others having fun because he's so miserable.

Keller: *Misery loves company.*

Ferris: He wants everyone to be as miserable as he is. So when you have leadership acting that way, then the troops begin to act that way.

Keller: *Of all the wrestlers, who did you like working with the most?*

Ferris: (Rick) Steamboat and (Tito) Santana, because when you worked with a Steamboat or a Santana or a Jake Roberts, there was some creativity. We sometimes didn't do the same thing every night. Jimmy Snuka, I enjoyed working with him. These people I named are very, very good professionals. With Savage you had a different story. With him, everything had to be preplanned and laid out. If anything changed, it was like he was haywire. Even if it was the same match we had done for four months in a row, every night, we still had to go over everything for 30 minutes prior to that match.

Keller: *Why was that? Just a quirk in wanting to plan ahead totally?*

Ferris: I don't know. Maybe it was a case of not being able to remember? Who knows?

Keller: *With what we see of Randy Savage on TV, is that pretty much what you get behind the scenes, a high-strung, rather unusual guy?*

Ferris: Yeah, yeah. Very, very, very high-strung, spring-wild kind of a guy. Not a pleasant fellow to be around. He dressed to himself in most cases.

Keller: *Don't say anything too personal that you don't feel comfortable with, but do think many of the wrestlers who knew Elizabeth and Randy were surprised that they broke up recently or was it more related possibly to professional pressures?*

Ferris: I don't think anybody was surprised because, like you said, professional pressure. Some of the things that went on, the way Randy was... well, professional pressure was a good way to put it.

Keller: *Did you have a lot of personal contact with Vince McMahon?*

Ferris: Yeah. Yeah, a lot.

Keller: *Really? A lot of people say they haven't. What was it like dealing with him?*

Ferris: So many people are afraid of Vince in so many aspects of the business and their dealings with him. I never was. Talking to Vince or dealing with Vince is just like dealing with Nick Gulas or Stu Hart or Joe Blanchard, any of the people I worked for. It was the same as talking with Rob Fuller or Ron Fuller or Bob Armstrong. I dealt with them all the same way. You know, Vince grew up in this business. He knows the business the same as I do. We all speak the same language.

Keller: *Do you admire Vince for the way he treated the wrestlers and the way he ran the company so smoothly even if it turned wrestlers into robots? As a professional businessperson is he to be admired for the way he did things?*

Ferris: Well, yeah, he obviously is very, very successful. More successful than anyone else in our business when it comes to what he's done. There's some admiration or hats off to a person who has done that. He's done more for professional wrestling than any other promoter. He's obviously a better promoter than most promoters. If he hadn't been, then he would be in the same shape as a lot of them: out of business.

Keller: *From your contact with him and knowledge about him, do you admire him personally?*

Ferris: Yeah, Vince is okay. I always had fun dealing with him. He is pleasant to be around. He's basically a nice guy. I

enjoyed dealing with Vince, but then again I was talent, he was promoter, and the two are just never going to get along (laughs). They're just never going to get along. You're looking at a guy who grew up in the wrestling business. He's been in the same business the wrestlers have. He's seen and done it all, too. He's just never been inside the ring to wrestle, other than that he's been around the business as long as just about anyone.

Keller: *Did you ever deal with Garvin or Patterson?*

Ferris: No, not really. My deal had always been and always will be that I'll never go to the backside of the horse. I always try to deal with his front-side, with the person who hires me. Vince hired me and, of course, Vince is the man I deal with and who when it comes time for me to leave the WWF, Vince was going to be the man to tell me. Nobody else was going to.

Keller: *And he was a man of his word with you?*

Ferris: Yeah. That's something we should talk about for a second. That question was asked of me before. How was Vince to work with in the early days versus how he is now and I can say that when I first started with Vince he was more honest and up-front than he is now. You've got to remember when I started with Vince almost five years ago, they didn't have this big corporate structure, they didn't have this gigantic thing with 50 tractor trailer trucks with all the sound equipment and all these things. It's really high-tech corporate now. Vince didn't have four secretaries before you got to see him. You know, it was all different. They had a little building out in Greenwich, Connecticut the first time I went over there, a little office over there. It was no big deal, just like talking to Jerry Jarrett or Nick Gulas or anybody else. As time went on with the dealings Vince had to do and the corporate way of life, it would get to the point where honesty is no longer their best policy. Tell 'em what they want to hear, please 'em, and then do what you have to do to stay on top.

But as time went on, what Vince would tell you sometimes wouldn't come true. It might not have been his fault. It could have been because something had changed or that because of something in corporate structure it couldn't have been done the way Vince told you face-to-face it would

be done or could be done. There are so many variables, that to say he was untruthful, well, he always did what he said with me. Well, he said I was going to have a big run with Hogan. I never really got it.

Keller: *You did something on NBC against him, right?*

Ferris: But that wasn't really a run. I had three or four matches in the four years. He promised me a run, which was three or four or six months of matches. I never got that. I wish I would have. I might have had Steamboat not quit and had Jake Roberts not suspended a couple of times when I had the belt. A lot of things go into why they change what they do. When Vince told me he was going to do something three weeks or six weeks down the road at TV, then it happened. If I called Vince up and said I had a problem with something, an interview, or didn't like the way it was done, or I didn't like how they had done something and it was changed from how originally planned, whatever, he'd make the right changes. But with the big corporate structure, it's harder to have that one-on-one with him that I had at the beginning.

Keller: *You mentioned you were friends with Hulk Hogan. What is Terry Bollea like behind the scenes, as a real person?*

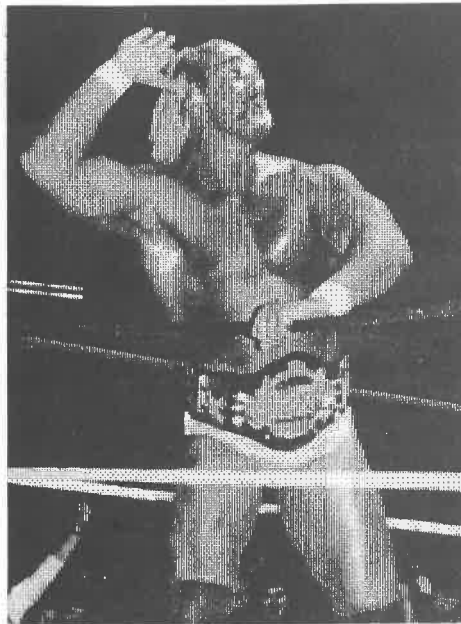
Ferris: Oh, he's a first-class gentleman. An extremely nice person. I've got nothing to ever say detrimental to him in any way because he's never been detrimental to me in any way.

Keller: *Was he helpful to others?*

Ferris: He's helped so many people that you really couldn't name them, Wade. He'll help anybody. He's just a good-natured person. He'd help anybody.

Keller: *What were some of the good things he did? Balance out some of the bad publicity with the other side of the person?*

Ferris: Gosh, he probably got all of us up there in the WWF, he was instrumental in getting us there. He was instrumental in me being there and (David) Shults being there. The list just goes on of people he's helped. And just the fact that he's drawn so many people into the arena, our pocketbooks swelled to capacity because of him just being around. If that's not helping us, what can a person expect? Here we



HULK HOGAN

were, making 40 or 50 dollars a night in this business and all of a sudden this Hulk Hogan thing comes along and takes this nation over and the boys are making five, six, ten thousand dollars a week. It was twenty thousand dollars a week when you wrestled Hulk Hogan. If anybody said they weren't helped by him, they are absolutely wrong.

Keller: *Were there any signs of jealousy on his part or was he just really giving?*

Ferris: Oh no, he didn't change when he was making possibly in excess of 20 million a year. That might be a low estimate. That had nothing to do with him. He was the same person as when I met him the first time, when he walked into the dressing room in Pensacola, Florida. Another guy who was the same was Beefcake. They travelled together, they came to Pensacola together, they've always been together as childhood friends, and neither one of them has changed one bit.

Keller: *What's the deal with the rumor that you originally were supposed to get the "Brutus Beefcake" role in the WWF before Ed Leslie was considered?*

Ferris: No. I don't know where that story came from. He was doing that thing when I was still in Canada. Ed was Dizzie Hogan in Portland, Oregon and maybe Minneapolis. If he wasn't wrestling in Minneapolis, he was living there. I've seen that, read that, and heard that I was supposed to be the original Beefcake. No I

wasn't. If I was, I wish they would have told me about it. I could have used that extra two years that Beefcake got at four- or five-hundred thousand dollars a year. They were making serious money back then. The money is not there anymore.

Three-hundred days a year, is it worth the money anymore? No, not any more. The money's not worth it anymore. When you ask why anyone would do 300 dates a year, the money was there. But as the money went down, there's no reason to do that.

Keller: *There was a quotation in the Penthouse article by David Shults saying Hogan used to be referred to as "the Tampa pipeline" for drugs. What's your reaction to that?*

Ferris: Well, I don't know.

Keller: *The reason I ask is earlier you said there has not been anything said that you knew wasn't true. If you knew Hogan in Tampa, then you might be able to refute that if it wasn't true.*

Ferris: Sometimes I wonder why David makes all these comments about Hulk. Heck, David wouldn't be getting all this publicity if it wasn't for Hulk.

Keller: *That doesn't mean that with all the good that there isn't an obligation to cover the bad, also, considering Hogan's stature as a hero celebrity.*

Ferris: Yeah, but unless you can prove all of these things, say here's the tapes, here's the facts, here's the photos, here's the people this happened to, then it is really all hearsay. That's the way I look at it.

Keller: *Do you think Hogan, given his leadership position in wrestling, could have done more to help the long-term future of wrestlers by forming a union of some kind?*

Ferris: If anybody could have helped the long-term or would help the long-term, it would be him. If there is anything he has not done that he could do or should do to help as opposed to just helping fatten guys' wallets like he is, I'd say now let's get the business-end of this straightened out.

Keller: *Do you think a union is something WWF wrestlers would benefit from?*

Ferris: I think it probably would help if it was run similar to the screen actors guild. If it was run that way where there were royalties for the merchandising and things

were paid for your performances the way it should be, then yes. Unions that do nothing, take your money, and try to stand the promoter up and those other things is not something wrestling needs.

Keller: *If the union was a good union, what are some of the things that are done today that the good union would stop right away?*

Ferris: Merchandising, royalty payments, medical payments, retirement pension. You don't even have to be a wrestler to be wiped out medically with medical bills nowadays. A retirement plan where the boys wouldn't be dumped out on the street.

Keller: *Does there seem to be a paranoia or concern on the wrestlers' part that without a union to back them, they cannot complain to management for fear of losing their jobs because they are so dispensable because the WWF is a virtual monopoly?*

Ferris: All the promoter has to do is say, "Hey, look, if you don't join up with these guys, I'll take care of you." And he pats him on the back. Now, wrestlers have heard that line about being taken care of their entire career. Why would they believe it one more time? Unfortunately, for some reason they're very gullible and believe that. So, once the union is all busted up, then the old "I'll take care of you" cliché is dead and buried; it never really happened. The boys know the promoters do not always mean what they say and say what they mean. If they just look at it that way and say, here's what we need to do, get some serious contracts with some protection clauses in the contracts, then I don't think there would even be a need for a union. They just need to negotiate, third-party negotiating, some serious good contracts that bind both the wrestler and the promoter that make it fair and reasonable.

Keller: *Do you see empowerment of wrestlers possible with Hulk Hogan out of the wrestling business on a full-time basis or will it take another person to come along with that much power to dictate for the good of the wrestlers?*

Ferris: I think it will just continue to be on an individual basis. Those who can negotiate and are good negotiating or are wanted by certain promoters, they will be able to get that kind of a contract in writing. The others, they're never going to get it.

You know, you mentioned a moment ago about there not being anywhere else to work, you hear the story about how Ultimate Warrior supposedly stood Vince up at the last SummerSlam for money. I spoke with a couple of wrestlers and asked them what they thought about it. They said, "Well, I think it's terrible that he stood Vince up. But, you know Vince fired him." Here's what I say back to them, Wade: "Well, I understand he got \$650,000." They said, "Yeah, that's right." So I say, "Well, he got \$650,000, but he got fired. What would you rather do, continue to work 300 dates a year because there's no place else for you to work anyway, and when he fires you, he could fire you tomorrow, or you could have instead \$650,000 and be fired?" They say, "Well, we never looked at it that way." I said, "Have you even made \$650,000 since you've been there." He said, "No." And I said, "Case closed." He said, "What would you have done?" I said, "Hey, look fella, if he could stand up and get his money, why don't we all stand up and demand our money, too?"

Keller: *Didn't you do something like what Warrior did at the first prime time NBC special where you held out?*

Ferris: With Savage. Yes. I refused to be beaten in the middle of the ring, one-two-three. I didn't stand him up for money or anything of that nature. Money was not the object. Money was the furthest thing from my mind. At that point in time, Wade, you might remember, I was extremely hot, we were doing business everywhere we went. Boston Garden, Madison Square Garden, Los Angeles, everywhere Savage and I went. And all of a sudden, here's what they said: "We want to get the belt on Randy and it will be Randy carrying Liz on his shoulders." Well, thanks to me, Randy did get a big push, because instead of the Intercontinental Title, at the next Wrestlemania he got the World belt. I sat there and listened to them tell Randy about the plans for him and they never even looked at me. They looked at me and said, "Wayne, what we want out of the match is about eight minutes. Wayne, we want a lot of bumps. Randy, you work out a lot of good highspots. Go about 8 minutes. Wayne, you make him look good. Randy, you slam him, climb to the top rope, come off with the elbow, and pin him one-two-three." I looked around and Vince said to me, "Wayne, Jimmy Hart will

then pull you out of the ring and then you won't be heard from again." I took not being heard from again as being cut loose. So I said, "So I'll be off-camera." He said, "Yeah, that'll be it." And I said, "Okay, fine."

I drove there from New York and then had to drive to New Haven to do interviews so I could listen to them tell me what they were going to do with Savage. I waited about three days and I thought about it and I said, "Nope, I'm not going to do it. I'm just not going to do it. I've worked my entire career to get over and to do something good and make some money and now they want to do this thing?" I said no.

So I called Jim Barnette in Atlanta and told him. He said, "Whatever you do, don't do it. We can use you down here right now." So I called Vince and he never called me back. I called him three times. I finally got in touch with him. They flew me into Stamford and we had a long talk about it. He said, "You don't understand, we were going to rebuild you." Yeah, right. That's like the \$6 million man on TV. They can rebuild him, but you can't rebuild me. I said, "I'm not going to lie down out there and be beat like a sack of shit." Here's what I told Vince: "Vince, I'll do it for two people. The first one is Hulk Hogan because he's my friend and he helped bring me here. I'll lay down out there for him. The other is you, I'll lay down out there for you because you're the promoter and you own the belt. If you want to put the tights on, I'll lay down for you. But nobody else am I gonna lay down for on national television."

My whole deal originally with Vince was this, Wade. Treat me good on TV. Put me in a position to draw. If I draw, pay me. If I don't, then let me go. And that was our deal. Treat me good on TV, and that means no jobs on television, give me a chance to draw. If I don't draw, don't pay me nothing. I reminded him of that and I said, "You shook hands on it, no jobs on TV." Well, you don't understand, Wayne. This is not really TV." I said, "No, it's not. It's an NBC special, the first time in 35 years you're going live on television and you want me to lie down out there."

Keller: *You had that added leverage because it was live television.*

Ferris: Correct. And I was also the most over heel they had other than Andre.

So when I refused to do it and they had already advertised it live on NBC, he had to make NBC happy. He had sold them on these matches. So he had to pacify me so they worked out a finish where it was a countout.

Keller: Was your quick job to Ultimate Warrior at a following SummerSlam the result of you using leverage with the live NBC show?

Ferris: No, he had told me long before he wanted to do this thing with the Ultimate Warrior. He had told me two, three months before that that he wanted to do this thing with the Ultimate Warrior. He just said he had some long-term plans for him, he needed someone to pick the torch up from Hogan. He wanted to groom this guy for it and he said, "You've got this belt. It's over. It's over so strong. You're over and you're over strong. It will really help all of us if we started him this way." I said, "Sure, Vince, no problem." Because at that point in time he treated me like a businessperson. The Savage thing, he treated me like a sack of shit.

Keller: Is Jim Hellwig as much of an outsider as we hear?

Ferris: When he first came in there, yeah, he was a total outsider. Nobody really understood or knew what he did that would make Vince put the Intercontinental belt on him.

Keller: Did he ever get close to the wrestlers or were people just keeping their distance speculating on how he got his push so quickly?

Ferris: Yeah, I think they're still wondering (laughs). There have been rumors, Wade, although they're only rumors.

Keller: How about Bobby Heenan behind the scenes? What was he like in your opinion?

Ferris: Bobby was a normal business person. I've known Bobby for a long time. Bobby's not the kind of guy where you'd want to give him something really valuable and say, "Hey, Bobby, hang on to this. If anything happens to me, pass this along to a friend of mine." Bobby would be the type to go, "I don't know what happened to it, it got lost." The only thing I can say about Bobby is you've got to watch him with two eyes, one in the front, one in the back. You can quote me on that.

Keller: What about Jake Roberts? You

worked with him quite a bit and now he's made a big splash in WCW.

Ferris: Jake, of course, had some problems in the WWF. He got suspended for drug abuse, things like that. Jake's got out-of-ring problems that he can hopefully get worked out. Of course, there's family problems. Like I said, you never know what goes on in somebody's personal life to make them the way they are. But professionally, he's very professional. He's very good in the ring, has great ideas, knows the business inside and out. I enjoyed working with him and being around him. When he left the arenas, whatever he did then, hey, it never interfered with our matches.

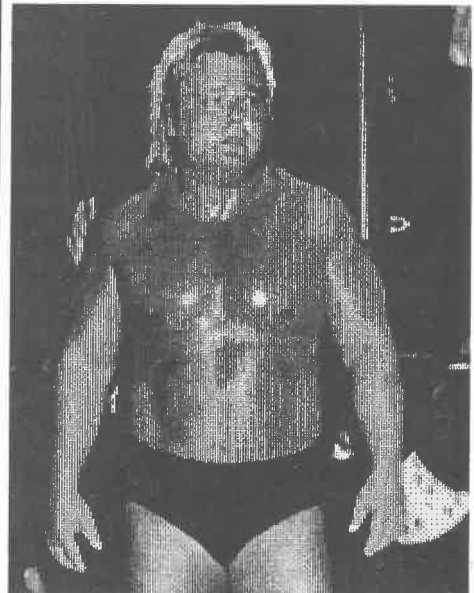
Keller: What led to your departure from the WWF?

Ferris: There's a whole story in itself. They teamed up Valentine and me. I'll be honest with you, I thought it was a good team. I thought it was a different kind of team. There was a showbusiness guy with the Honkeytonk Man and a real hardcore wrestler in Valentine. You dye his hair black and call us "Rhythm & Blues" and he was as horrible a dancer as I was and a worse guitar player and the scenario there was great. The contrasting style of the two partners made for a good team. We thought they might do something with us, if for no other reason, there weren't any other teams around. I think the only reason they put us together and tried to do anything with even a little bit of heat was because we were an insurance team in case the Road Warriors did not come to the WWF. When they actually appeared in the WWF, there was no reason to have "Rhythm & Blues" anymore because it was obvious with our characters, with what we did with the guitars, we would take away from somebody with painted faces. There had been painted faces in the WWF before with Demolition and the Powers of Pain. So here was a third team with painted faces.

Rhythm & Blues, on the other hand, was a totally different, off-the-wall, abstract type of team. We created excitement and people loved to hate us—especially when Valentine dyed his hair. Vince was cutting back and he was going to let people go after the Survivor Series, including Valentine. So he calls me over and says, "Here's what I want to do with you. I want to keep you on the roster, but in any sports, you gotta' have a depth chart." Vince always liked my interviews. He liked

the fact that I could talk. He liked the fact that I could carry a three or five minute interview, that I could go out and make personal appearances—I had great recommendations from people when I made personal appearances. So he thought I would be a great spokesperson for the WWF, an up-front media person. I didn't think I would be. I thought I was better as a performer, not a diplomat.

But I said that I would give it a try. He



GREG VALENTINE

said, "I think it would be great if you worked on TV with me." Great, so everything was set. He said, "Bruce Prichard (formerly Brother Love) would be handling my airplane ticket, make arrangements for me to be in Stamford to do the thing with him once every three weeks. The first week I was supposed to go, I got no plane tickets. Okay. Vince calls me up and said there was a mistake and he would get to the bottom of it. He said, "Don't worry. Three weeks from now when we tape, we'll have you in here for TV."

Keller: Who took your place on that one?

Ferris: They just went ahead and did it with only Piper. You see, they were looking for that third party, and plus Piper didn't want to work the whole deal. Piper's got his own negotiating gimmick where he comes in, works for a few weeks, leaves, and then comes in again.

So the third week comes along and everything is fine. Other than the fact that I get to LaGuardia Airport and there's nobody there to pick me up and take me to Stamford. You can see now, after

four-and-a-half years of being a wrestler, I never had a problem with getting tickets, with booking sheets, or how to get there. Now, I start going over to TV and things are beginning to get messed up. It's as if somebody didn't want me to be at TV sitting beside Vince doing commentary. So when that got straightened out, next time I was supposed to go to Madison Square Garden. I get a plane ticket, a one-way ticket from New York to Memphis and it wasn't even the day I was supposed to be at Madison Square Garden. Now that's the third time. Now the fourth time comes along, I tell Vince things are really getting messed up. It's horrible. He told me to tell Bruce Prichard. The fourth time, there's no tickets. I told my wife, "That's it." You see, they've got to get me tickets every three weeks so they could actually get me tickets six months ahead. They know what day they're going to do voice-overs well ahead of time.

Keller: *Would you say Vince was trying to drive you away, someone else was, or this was a coincidence?*

Ferris: I don't know. If there was one question I could ask him some day and he could be totally honest in his answer, it would be to tell me, "I knew it was happening," or "No, Wayne, I didn't know it was happening, I wish you had told me." Obviously somebody knew what I would do. When you are around somebody long enough, you find out what they do in a certain situation. If you mess with my paycheck, I'll leave. And if my travel is messed up, I won't show up at all. So they messed with my travel, and the last time, I waited until three o'clock, FedEx didn't run, I was supposed to be at Madison Square Garden to do the angle with Greg Valentine after the Christmas show, but no tickets to get there. I called the lawyer and I said, "Send them my notice."

And Vince called me and here's what he said: "What are you doing?" "Just sitting here in Memphis." "What are you doing in Memphis? You're supposed to be in Madison Square Garden doing commentary tonight." I said, "Well, I never got any tickets." He said, "What do you mean you never got any tickets? Didn't you go to the airport, they had a pre-paid ticket there for you?" I said "Vince, why should I call the airport? This is the fourth time I haven't had tickets." And he hung up on me. That's the last word I had with him.

And there were some more mitigating factors that went into that, Wade. Along with that, he gave me a TV commentating contract. The contract was completely one-sided. I thought there were some changes that needed to be made on it and he would not make the changes. He flat-out told me that it was a good contract. I had worked for three weeks and had not been paid yet for it. I asked about that three week's pay he owed me and he said I would get it when I signed the contract. I said, "I'm also on a wrestling contract for the next nine months." He said, "Well, I don't know if you're on a wrestling contract. Just sign this and everything will be okay." So I never signed the contract and things weren't okay. So somebody got rid of me. They let Valentine go. But they made me quit. I wish they would have just told me, "We're finished with you." That was my deal. Tell me when you're done with me and I'll leave. I don't care.



RODDY PIPER (Photo by Jerry Wilson)

Keller: *You mentioned Roddy Piper. What was he like behind the scenes versus his on-camera personality?*

Ferris: Hard to get to know kind of guy. He kept all his thoughts to himself very well. A lot of people tend to say things they shouldn't say or say what's on their mind or tend to be up-front and candid. He was not up-front and candid at all. He would smile and listen to what you had to say, and not really comment.

Keller: *How about Curt Hennig?*

Ferris: Curt seemed to be a nice guy. Curt, you know, I can see now when I see he's still doing his thing on TV commentary, he would rib guys and say, "I wouldn't let them do this to me, Bossman," or "Hey, Rude, I wouldn't put up with it," but meanwhile, while he's trying to get Rude worked up or Bossman worked up, he's putting up with whatever he wants to.

Keller: *Who were the locker room leaders? For instance, on the Minnesota Twins, Kirby Puckett is considered the heart of the team. Who was the locker room leader in the WWF?*

Ferris: That's a good question. Jimmy Hart and I had talked about this. When Hogan is not in the locker room, it was like a loss in leadership. We had no leader. Savage was not a leader because he was very much to himself. He didn't come around the wrestlers. The Warrior was very much to himself. He didn't associate with the wrestlers. Once he got into a position to have his own private dressing room in all the buildings, you never saw him. Whereas Hogan, if he did have a private dressing room, he wouldn't even use it. He'd be in dressing with the other boys. We didn't have any leadership without him. You could definitely tell there was a morale problem when Hogan wasn't around.

Keller: *There wasn't anybody who even came close?*

Ferris: Nobody came even close to picking the torch up. Nobody. First of all, Wade, nobody would even extend themselves to even try to do it because then you pick up so much heat and hatred and animosity from the wrestlers and the office, nobody even tried to pick the morale up.

Keller: *Who in the WWF did you admire more than anybody else? Front-office person, another wrestler, anybody.*

Ferris: That's hard to say, Wade, because I don't want to leave anybody else out. All the guys who are in the business, they have a certain amount of admiration from me just because they've been in the business and done those things they had to do to stay in it, especially guys who have had to be in as long as I have. Some of the younger guys who haven't paid their dues by wrestling for \$10 a night and \$20 matches, things like that, or haven't had their eyes and ears busted by chairs and tables and bottles and cans like I have, then

I don't have too much admiration for them.

Keller: *What about your future? What are your interests or prospects with hooking up with the WWF or WCW?*

Ferris: I wouldn't do anything on that type of schedule for anybody anymore.

Keller: *Because of your son being in second grade?*

Ferris: Right. WCW, I wouldn't mind working for them. It's an organization with new management and they do it different than the WWF. It would be new for me since I've never been there. I would only want to do television and pay-per-views. I honestly believe that the day is going to come—and it already is creeping up on the WWF—that house shows are not the way to do it. It's going to be television all the way and pay-per-view. And WCW, they don't draw a lot in their house shows, so it would be a waste to go there. I would be better off to work 30 or 40 or 50 dates a year that they had for television and do it that way.

Keller: *If you worked out such a deal, would you worry about getting heat from the wrestlers who do have to put up with the 300-date schedule?*

Ferris: There again, it goes back to negotiating. Cut your own deal, man. If your deal is to work TV only, then great. If you want to go out there and spend the night in these hotel rooms and fly all over the country, then by all means go do it. But that's not something that drives me.

Keller: *How often are you working now independently?*

Ferris: I work as much as I want. I would like to work 50 or 60 wrestling dates. Not weekends, but wrestling dates or personal appearances. That's all I really want to do.

Keller: *How do you like working independently?*

Ferris: I thoroughly enjoy it. I've been able to stay out here in the independents in the last two years longer than anybody. Orton and Orndorff have been out in the independents longer than I have. I thoroughly enjoy it. I'm able to control my own destiny. I'm able to pick and choose who I work for, who I wrestle, when and where I want to work, and for how much I work for. That's all predetermined. I've got a set fee, just as a doctor or lawyer does to

perform the service. If they can't pay the fee, then I'm not the one for them. And only the ones that call me are the ones that can pay it and are legitimate independent promoters. It's great. For me it works out fine. I wouldn't give it up to go work for Vince for 300 days a year. No way.

Keller: *If you hadn't saved money, is the independent scene for at least you and select few others strong enough to get by in a pretty healthy way?*

Ferris: You're not going to set the world on fire working the independents. Some are one-shot deals. A lot cancel out. A lot of independents are just out of business now. There's not a lot of them around. I turn some of them down. I could probably work 100 times a year, and that might be enough to suffice a guy a decent living. But you would have to take some chances with independents that aren't really legitimate. I've had my share of those, a couple bad checks passed to me and things like that.

Keller: *Are those promoters still promoting today? In other words, should you give fair warning to other wrestlers about them?*

Ferris: Herb Abrams is the one who passed me the bad check. He still owes me—and you can put the figure down—he owes me \$1500. I'm not the only one who has surfaced that.

Keller: *No. His reputation has been covered in the newspapers. Are there any others who are worthy of being warned about?*

Ferris: No, nobody else has stiffed me on a check. Some of them have gone out of business or cancelled on me. So what I do about that is I get a deposit from them. If they call me today, they have to send me a deposit within five working days. If I don't get a deposit from them and someone else calls on day number six, I'll take their date. I don't hold dates open.

Keller: *How would you grade the current health of U.S. independent wrestling?*

Ferris: It's suffering just like the big promotions are. I did a fair show in Hagerstown, Maryland the other night. We had probably 2500 people. That was many people as they had at the Cap Center for the WWF last month. That was about as three times as many people as WCW had in Baltimore. Some of the independents

percentage-wise with the size of the building, the amount of rent they have to pay, and the amount of people that are on the card, they actually do better. You talk about renting Madison Square Garden with 22,000 seats and you sell 6,000 tickets, percentage-wise you're not doing very well. Then you've got to have ten matches with superstars from TV and fly them in. But it's still suffering.

Keller: *Is there any advice you could give to independent promoters on how to better make it in these hard times?*

Ferris: It's the economic trends. The only advice I'd have for any of them is to do more telemarketing. The telemarketers tend to do the best. With no real brow-beating or foot-stomping promotion where you have to go out and beat the bushes to sell the town. Instead, you sell it off to a telemarketer and let them do it.

Keller: *Explain what the telemarket then does.*

Ferris: Somehow, I don't know the details on it, but they're able to call up these establishments and places of business and sell the tickets as a fund-raiser type of thing, and sell an ad book and things of that nature. When a promoter calls me who's done a telemarketing show, there's no risk there, it's already paid for, the tickets are already sold, and it's a no-risk situation. Whereas some of these independents will still try to go out and do window cards and radio and TV commercials and newspapers. I think the day of doing that independent-wise is over. It's too risky.

Keller: *Have you thought of hooking up with the GWF for a taping or two just to get your face and name out on national cable again just to keep your independent value?*

Ferris: As you know, I'm on that SportsChannel now with Mario Savoldi's ICWC or whatever it's called.

Keller: *IWCCW.*

Ferris: Yeah, whatever. I'm on their show every day of the week here. I see it here in Memphis, I've got an interview and altercation with Rick Rude, so that's keeping me on TV. I did a commercial with Hulk Hogan back in December and we're waiting for this thing to start playing. It's the World Game Federation. It's on this Nintendo thing. It's on the Amazing Discoveries show, you know like with the

Juice Tiger. That will begin running over and over again and, Wade, I won't need any publicity. That's going to run forever.

Keller: *Have you paid any attention to the changes Bill Watts has made since he came in?*

Ferris: No, not a whole lot because I'm not a Bill Watts fan. I think that's going to be detrimental to the company down there and the wrestling business.

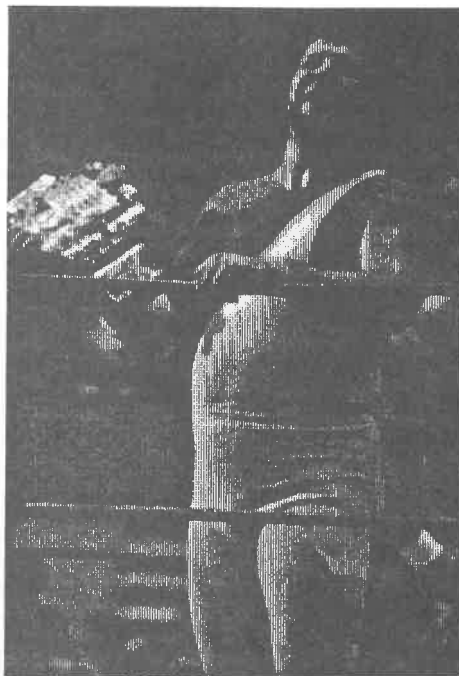
Keller: *Why is that?*

Ferris: He's living too much in the past. The business has changed, wrestlers' attitudes have changed. You're not dealing with the same kind of wrestling anymore. You've got wrestlers. You've got guys now who don't understand driving 500 miles to a town. You can't make these guys be top professionals when they don't know how to be professionals. I think Bill might be living in the past in that aspect. If he's trying to change the business, he's fighting a never-ending battle. If he's going to try to change the business, he needs to look to the future to change the business. Some kind of laser gimmicks or flying saucers, but definitely not down-on-the-mat wrestling. I don't think it can ever go back to that.

Keller: *Are there any ideas you have where wrestling is falling short and not succeeding like it should, either the WWF, WCW, or a third group that could just start out of nowhere?*

Ferris: I don't think anybody could just start out of nowhere now. Vince is so far ahead of WCW. It's too bad he's so far ahead of them with all the technology and all the facilities they have in Atlanta, they should actually be ahead of Vince. But they're not. For some reason, they've still got that Southern mentality. It's that touch of Southernism they have in their wrestling programs and production. They can do a great baseball and a great basketball game, but when it comes to wrestling, they set wrestling back when it comes to their production. But Vince is so far ahead of them, and he would be so far ahead of anybody else who tried. Even with the fact that Lawler and Jarrett have been running here for 20 years and they're still so far behind on the technology and being able to put a production together. It's lacking. But yet, it costs a lot of money to do that and they don't have that kind of money.

Keller: *What do you think of the USWA and Lawler and Jarrett as promoters?*



JERRY "THE KING" LAWLER (Photo by Tracy Breedon)

Ferris: You know, they took that territory from Nick Gulas and Roy Welch many years ago because they didn't like working for Nick because Nick paid \$20 and \$25 a night and Nick's son George was wrestling and Nick wanted George to have everything. It's funny, I say wrestling will never go back the way it was, but it does repeat itself. Jarrett and Lawler are paying \$20 and \$25 a night now, just like Nick did. Jarrett's got his son working and Lawler's got his sons working, and that's the reason they broke away from Nick 20 years ago, because of the payoffs and because of the son.

Keller: *That is pretty ironic.*

Ferris: It is very ironic.

Keller: *What might you do with yourself if you don't hook up with a major promotion?*

Ferris: I don't know, Wade. I really don't think about that. I know that being in the wrestling business is a very unique thing to be in. Not everybody can do it. Not everyone has been able to do what I've done. Just that, sooner or later, will carry me into WCW or the WWF. They're going to need experienced, serious talents. And I'll be here. I'm one of those experienced, serious talents. I've got the little 900 number which is doing real good for me. I've got the mail order pictures for fans who want autographed photos. I'm thinking about getting my old wrestling boots and

tights that I don't wear anymore and do one of those memorabilia sell-off type things. There's some collectors that want that kind of stuff. And I've got some stuff I haven't touched in 15 years. Who knows. I was sitting in Calgary and that was a deep-freeze. I was in cold storage, so-to-speak. Nobody had heard from me in two years and all of a sudden I got picked up by the WWF, so who knows. Two years from now I will get picked up by somebody.

What I really hope for is maybe some of these European independent promoters will start up because the market is so big over there in Europe and so strong. Vince is not going to be able to run the smaller towns over there. And he's going to definitely run the big towns and run them often because it's obvious the States are terrible for him. Vince is not going to make it in America, he's going to have to make it overseas. Hopefully, some independents will open up over there and I can make serious money independent-wise in Europe. Work there for a week or two and then come back home.

Keller: *Are you interested in doing any promoting?*

Ferris: No. No promoting at all. I couldn't care less about that. I'm a wrestler, not a promoter. It's like I told Vince about the TV commentary. I would rather be in front of the camera than behind it.

Keller: *Why don't you work for Jarrett and Lawler since you're right there in Memphis?*

Ferris: Well, they broke away from a guy because of certain guys for a reason and now they're doing the same thing. I just can't stomach that. That's an insult to have someone drive 200 miles and pay them \$25. And with the price I charge, they couldn't come near paying me, anyway. It's best that we just don't talk to each other. Plus, I've always said ten years ago when I was starving to death and needed a place to work, they wouldn't use me. Now that I've got a name for myself and could probably make them some money, I won't let them use me.

Keller: *What's the old saying? Be good to people on your way up because you might run into them on your way down?*

Ferris: Yes. I hope they read that because it's good for them to know they should have used me.

